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Marriage Crisis Among the Newly Married Couples of GN. Fuvahmulah, Maldives

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ABSTRACT

The paper aims to find out the causes of high divorce rates in Fuvahmulah City, Maldives. This paper tries to narrate the psychological situation of the respondents due to marriage crisis. Marital relationship gets affected due to various causes such as migration to resorts in search of employment. Physical distance between couples leading to weakening of emotional bond. Families suffer immensely, as there is little time to spend together. Second, the city is growing economically due to booming tourism and hospitality industry. The city has become centre of attraction for the tourists globally. The multicultural milieu which has been brought by growing tourism industry affected the social institutions like marriage and family. People getting into extra marital relationships with tourists lead to increased divorce rate. Divorce rate in the city is raising in an alarming rate. The major causes of divorce adhere to socio-economic and geographic conditions of the Island.

Keywords: Divorce, GN. Fuvahmulah, Maldives, Marriage Crisis.

1. INTRODUCTION

Marriage is the lawful bonding of the two people who want to spend their life together. Today marriage has come to be perceived as an instrument to fulfil personal needs of individuals like, affection, security, social status and maintaining life itself (Vanjani 1989). Reaching at a certain age every boy or girl wish to get married. According to Anthony Giddens (1991), the foundation of relationships and marriage has changed with time. Today people are more liberal to define their relationships at their convenience, rather than blindly following the roles they are given by the society. Ulrich Beck (1992), his view on marriage is similar to that of Anthony Giddens. According to him, we now breathe in a 'risk society' where customs and traditions are given less stimulus and people are having numerous choices. Hence, we are more conscious of risk (we have

established a 'risk consciousness'). People devote more time calculating the risks and rewards of divergent courses of action prevailing (Thompson 2014). Along with the change in family norms in the contemporary society, the pattern of marriage is also changing (Vanjani 1989). He further writes-both marriage and family are oldest and most basic and fundamental institutions. Both are important for existence, organization and functioning not only of social life in society, but also for the creation, sustenance and continuation of the all human beings who constitute the society.

The primary objective of establishment of a family according to Islam is the perpetuation of the human species through the satisfaction of the sexual urge (Bhende and Kanitkar 2015). There is no universal law of practicing marriage. Maintaining a family while going with flow of changes occurring in the world is challenging for most of the people. Industrialization and globalization; the sharing of ideas, experiences and lifestyle of people and cultures (Ahuja 2015) has led to changes in the local culture affecting different social institutions. Family is one of the institution adversely affected by the modernization and advancement of society. The family system has weakened due to the various factors. This phenomenon is no exception when it comes to a small island nation like Maldives. Relationships has weakened over the years due to various causes. The multicultural milieu which has been brought by growing tourism industry affected the social institutions like marriage and family. People getting into relationships with tourists before and after marriage, leading to increased divorce rate. Divorce rate in the island nation with a population of only 344,023 (Census 2014), is raising in an alarming rate. Maldives holds the divorce rate of highest in the world, that is, 10.97 divorces per 1000 and, almost half of the women are divorced three to four times by the time they reach thirty-years of age (Fahmy 2014).

Republic of the Maldives

Maldives is an island nation of around 300,0000 people, located in the Indian ocean. There are around 1,190 islands of which less than 200 islands are inhabited, grouped into 20 natural atolls. The capital Male' is the largest city which accommodates one third of the Maldivian population, in an area of less than four square kilometres. The country's economy is highly depended on tourism and fisheries industry being the second. The government revenue which is gained from the tourism is almost Ninety percent, which is resulting from tourism-related taxes and import duties. The role of Agriculture and manufacturing in the economy is very less, due to the limited availability of cultivable land and the shortage of domestic labour. The representation of women with a percentage of 56 in the labour market, which is fewer compared to the male population with 78 percent, resulting to extensive gender imbalances. One of the major social challenges faced by the country is youth unemployment due to the failure to cope up with the growing number of school leavers (UNDP 2011). As of 2007, the data collected from 86 resorts with the bed capacity of 18,257, out of the staff in tourism sector, 51 per cent are local staff and 46 per cent foreign (Ministry of Tourism 2008).

While 70 percent of the foreign exchange earnings to the country is derived from tourism industry, one third of the government revenue is generated from this sector (Ministry of Tourism 2017), it failed to captivate the unemployment rate in the county. This led to the migration within the country. As most of the resorts are located in the northern part of the country, people from the southern islands are forced to move out of the home and get settled in resorts.

Fuvahmulah City

The Fuvahmulah city which is located in the southern part of the Maldives officially achieved the city status by the president in October 2016, as the city fulfill the standard of 10,000 people and more. However, the city fails to generate employment for the huge population of 12,012 people (Year Book 2017). People are moving out to resorts in search of employment created distance from their families leading to weakening of emotional bond. Families suffer immensely, as there is little time to spend together. While the lack of opportunities at the city is pushing the population out, the attractive salary in resorts are luring people towards it. The city cannot just be referred as a victim of unemployment. The city is growing economically due to booming tourism and hospitality industry. The city has become centre of attraction for the tourists from within and outside the country.

Large proportion of migrants out of the city are male migrants and are married leaving their families behind in search of employment. Migratory movements are creation of social, cultural, economic, political, and/or physical conditions in which people and societies find themselves (Bhende and Kanitkar 2015). The migrants mingle with people of different cultures in their work places which affect their own. Married and single people get into relationships with tourists in both cases. The male member who is employed in resorts are involved with someone at their workplace, on the other hand the female member who is left at home get involved with a local tourist or someone form the city. The institution of marriage in Maldives is not strong enough to withstand such waves, unlike some other South Asian countries like India, where marriage is bond which is to be fulfilled till death. In Maldives, according to the Sharia and Law, getting married and getting a Divorce is a simple process.

A marriage may be sanctified in the Maldives only by a legal *mauzun* in the presence of the judicial guardian of the bride and two eyewitnesses along with the man and woman who wish to get married. Two parties wanting to get marries are required to get the permission of the judicial guardian of the bride and complete all other formalities obligatory to be finished in respect of a marriage solemnized as per the requirements of the family Act 2000. Although a man is allowed four wives at one time, it is only on condition of his being able to support them (Rosset 1887).

According to the Concise Oxford Dictionary of Sociology (1994), 'the formal legal dissolution of legally constituted marriage' is called divorce. Like marriage, divorce is governed by variety of restrictions and cultural rules. Rules and procedures regarding divorce differs widely from society to society. In countries like Spain, Peru and Brazil, marriage is indissoluble except by death. The laws of Judaism and Islam gives the power to husband to terminate his marriage simply renouncing his wife. A woman cannot give a divorce to her husband, she must seek it, which is called *kulah* (Dharam Vir 2006).

The high divorce rate in Maldives is not only caused by the growing current of modern trends. The nation accepted the religion of Islam, which gradually substituted Buddhism in 1153–54 under the rule of King Dovemi Kalaminja. Being an Islamic country, sex outside marriage is considered a taboo and is punishable under the law. This led to both male and female entering into married life as early as eighteen years, which is the legal age to get married. Within two to three years, the newly married couples start having problems, leading to divorce. Divorce is the last resort under the Quran, but Muslim husbands divorce their wives to sit their whim and fancies (Dharam Vir 2006). The purpose of marriage for each differ according to the circumstances of their life. Marriage for them is not to maintain a sacred bond, but to have sexual

relationship legally or just an escape from the matrimonial home. In many cases early marriage leads to violence and hardship faced by the women from their husband or in-laws. Man wants to take possession of the women to wield power over her, and women wants to conquer the heart of man and prevail upon him through his heart (Dharam Vir 2006).

In Maldives the process of getting married have been relatively easy. It is very much visible in the writing of the visitors like C.W. Rosset. He writes (1887) A man is able to at any time to divorce one or more of his wives, the process being as simple as the marriage. According to the statistics in 1900s the divorce rate is much higher compared to today. In the year 2000, there were 3829 marriages, and 1928 divorces, which means above 50 per cent of the marriage ended up in divorce. This rate is relatively high in an Islamic country. And in the year 2002, the divorce rate is 32 per cent according to the government figures, almost 18 per cent lower compared to the year 2000. According to the statistics of Department of National Planning (Fahmy 2014), Maldives 5,699 couples got married in the year 2012 and 3,011 couples got divorced.

The major causes of divorce in Fuvahmulah city adhere to socio-economic and geographic conditions of the Island.

2. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON MARRIAGE

In the realm of sociology three major theories have emphasized on marriage problems. Structural-functional theory, conflict theory and symbolic interactions have different outlook on marriages. A marriage may function due to various functions. In Fuvahmulah like any other society, marriage is the legal bond for the people in order to have the sexual relationship for procreation of family. This gives way to reproduction, which is an essential part of the family system. The family is responsible for the upbringing of children, teaching them socialization and enculturation. Family also teaches them cultural norms, values, beliefs, etc. Structural-functionalists have studied marriage from a macro or broad perspective. This theory proposes less common functions that affect some marriages, but most significant functions affecting almost every marriage (Mast 2008).

Conflict theorists also have a macro or broad perspective on marriage with a view on major trends of different ethnic groups', roles they perform and acceptance in society. By analysing the benefits that are obtained from marriages by men and women, they are in fact comparing men and women. They can then comprehend the major conflicts origins in a marriage. Families in Fuvahmulah are private entities. People are resistant to have outside interventions in their family live. Be it from the government side of other civil society organizations. Conflict theory holds the notion that men are superior over the women. It is very much visible in a society like Fuvahmulah. Hence there is a struggle for power among the people in Fuvahmulah. This generates conflict as the men try to preserve their power while women are struggling to take hold of more power, which may lead to domestic violence in some cases. As per this theory the rising divorce rate is the result of women gaining access to jobs and money, which were held only by men previously (Jameadows 2013).

The symbolic-interaction theory gives emphasis to the point of view of an individual that is the part of the situation, and the perspective of the individual and how they interconnect based on the society they belong to. Marriage is defined by the people in their subjective needs of it. In the society of Fuvahmulah,

most people get married at a young age, in order to avoid sexual relationship outside marriage. Some people, mostly women prefer to be married early to avail financial needs. In some cases of the study done in Fuvahmulah, women are divorced with no plans to get married. It is estimated that their perspective on marriage has change due to the disfunction in their previous relationship. Loosing trust in the relationships after a divorce, leading to psychological problems is a scenario that seems to be appearing in the city.

3. RATIONALE OF STUDY

This study tries to find out the causes of marriage crisis and high divorce rates in GN. Fuvahmulah Maldives. The causes and effects of divorce in Fuvahmulah. How people are affected emotionally and psychologically. This study covers socio-demographic profile of the divorcees, causes of divorce, process and procedures of divorce, consequences of divorce, the psychological condition of the divorcees in post divorced life and their conditions, the legal process for divorce and the opinion of divorcees about the procedures, possibility of intervention to reduce the increasing divorce rate or assisting the better settlement of the divorcees. The issue of marriage crisis among the newly married couples is the central focus of this research. A study of this kind will help government, civil societies and social workers to device strategies to counsel persons undergoing marital crisis. Divorce settlement, post-divorce life and consequences followed by the divorce.

4. METHODOLOGY

For the study I have chosen both male and female members. My target age group was between 18 years to 40 years. According to the data collected from 30 people out of which 66 per cent are females and 33 per cent are males, of which 13 per cent respondents are divorced and 86 per cent are married and 66 per cent have been married only once to their partner. The 33 per cent who have been divorced are females only. It is estimated that among the respondents 60 per cent are between 21 years to 30 years. 40 per cent respondents lie between 31 years to 40 years. There are no respondents in the age group between 18 years to 20 years. Among the respondent's 13 per cent of the people are divorced and have no plan for remarriage according to them.

The objectives of this study are to highlight the causes of marital problems and divorce in Fuvahmulah city.

5. CAUSES OF MARITAL PROBLEMS AND DIVORCE

1. Mismatch of Interest

The current research reveals that, more than 63 per cent of the people have mentioned it “mismatch of interest”, is an issue in their relationship. Though the people in Fuvahmulah practice love marriage as a form of marriage, they are facing this problem. It is assumed that, even though they have been involved in premarital relationship they are not able to understand each other's interests and their lifestyle. It is only after marriage that they come to know the real self of significant other. It leads to conflict between couples most of the cases. In Maldives sex before marriage is a punishable act according to the Sharia and Law practised in Maldives, punishable by flogging, and pregnancy outside marriage is a criminal offence with strict legal and social consequences. Despite this, the social observation in the Maldives shows that

sexual activity among unmarried Maldivian youth exists and at an early age, nevertheless of social norms and legal consequences (World Bank 2014).

2. Less Time for Families

Maldivian society is a patriarchal society; it is no taboo to send women to take up work in Maldives. Both men and women continue to work even after marriage. However, women are given the double-burden of a homemaker and to work. Hence, while men have the opportunity to take high paid jobs outside the city in resorts, their wives are taking small jobs in departmental stores or government jobs with a nominal payment to be with the family. The role of male members in the upbringing of the children is absent in most of the households. Men come home to their families once or twice a year which leads to conflict at times. 23 per cent of the respondents agree that they face crisis due to the insufficient time they get to spend with families. Both are busy in their work. Income of one person is insufficient as the cost of living is high. Some couples have very less time for family and they do not have time for each other. Their work becomes more important for them. This is also a factor which leads to crisis among the couples.

3. Income and Marital Problems

Women hinge on their husbands for social status and financial support, though they may also have been financial contributors to the household (George 2002). As per the study, 23 per cent of the respondents say they face conflict due to financial problem. Though women are mostly independent and are capable of taking care of their financial needs, few people depend on their husbands for financial support. If the husband is not able to do so, it leads to conflict. Being a patriarchal society, husbands take the responsibility of their wives financially. It is therefore the responsibility of the husband to make sure that financial needs of his wife are fulfilled.

4. Drug Abuse

There has been a growing concern about the fast rise in drug abuse among Maldivian youth in the past few years. Drug exploitation in the Maldives have amplified 40-fold between 1977 and 1995. In 2012 on drug occurrence exhibited that there were 7,496 present drug users (4,342 in Malé and 3,154 in the atolls) aged between 15 to 64 years in the country. The predictable drug use prevalence for Malé and the atolls were 6.64 percent and 2.02 percent correspondingly (UNDP 2014).

Among the respondents, one has gone through divorce due to this. Development and growing alcohol and drug addiction is a major factor which leads to increase of divorce rates (Sheykhi 1999). Male members are mostly involved in drug use. These people cannot find good jobs and they suffer from financial problems. Their partners are forced to work to take care of the family. At times they force their partners to provide money for them, which they waste on drugs. These people care less about family and children. They are violent towards their partner and kids. Some abuse their wives physically, while they are on drugs. They are unable to provide financial or emotional support to their family.

The personality theory has explained drug usage in terms of satisfying certain psychological needs or distinctive personality traits associated with drug dependence and emphasized on dependent personality as the cause of drug dependence (Ahuja 2015). Drug abuse is no doubt a personal problem, but there are

circumstances in the society, which encourage people to engage in various unhealthy activities. As, the sociological theory holds that it is the circumstances or social environment which make people drug addicts (Ahuja 2015). In Maldives the youth have access to the drugs very easily, leading them to start using it for fun at first, which later turns out as an addiction.

5. Domestic Violence

Violence against women is based on the economic and political powerlessness in patriarchal societies (Madhurima and Jain 2005). According to a survey conducted by ministry of Gender and Family development (Fulhu 2004), domestic violence occurs in different forms in Maldives. It maybe sexual, financial, or emotional. WHO reports that, in majority of the cases the abusers are among the family (Fulhu 2004). It is believed in Maldives and any other patriarchal society that; a good wife always obeys her husband. The sub-culture of violence theory claims that violence is a cultural way of life in the working class and black communities; thus, its members comes to take violence for granted, and it becomes a routine feature of everyday life (Madhurima and Jain 2005). However, Maldivian constitution strictly prohibits any violence towards the wife. Today according to the law of Maldives, husband cannot have intimate relationship with his wife without her consent. It is considered as rape, and husband will be punished with same charges as rape.

Among the respondents, three percent has mentioned that partner is violent towards them. Ultimately their marriage ended. Women still experience violence but are simply not ready to report domestic violence at a time when their lives and those of their families are under risk (Maguire 1998). Most of the cases of domestic violence go unsolved, as it is not reported by those who experience it.

6. Extra-marital Affairs

Involving in extra-marital affairs is considered by respondents as a major cause of their divorce. According to the geographic location of Fuvahmulah, most of the people are forced to move to far away resorts or to the capital, Male' in search of a job. This created distance relationship between couples. In some of the scenarios, couples end up separating due to the extra-marital affair by husband in his work place or due to extra-marital affair of wife at home. Since they both are forced to live separately, it affects their married life. Their livelihood is based in such a way that they have no trust towards their partner. So, if in any case they find that their partners are being involved with another person they tend to believe it very quickly. They do not accept their partners' reasons. The society becomes more trustworthy than their partners. They seem to believe the rumours rather than their partners words.

7. Anger Issues

A Muslim woman is divorced, if her husband utters the word "divorce" at the time of anger according to the Islamic Sharia. According to this study, it is estimated that anger issues are there among the respondents. One respondent has mentioned that her husband uttered the word divorce during an argument and regretted it later. They, then decided to *rāju* their marriage and continue with their life. It takes a second to break years to effort they put in a marriage. At times people do this by mistake at the moment if intense and anger and some carry on their life with same partners and some get separated. According to Islamic sharia, there are certain conditions in which this kind of divorce is accepted. The husband should be mentally fit at the

time of doing so. If the person is angry and is not aware of what he is doing, pronouncing of divorce is not accepted at such a moment according to scholars. For divorce to be accepted by court of law the person must be mentally liable at the time of uttering it, though he is doing it out of anger.

Other Factors

Apart from the above-mentioned factors, it is estimated from the data that, men have the intention of going for a second marriage at some point. Respondents who have participated in the research, 6 per cent of them have mentioned that they wish to have another wife. However, their wives do not agree to that. The husband must get the approval of his wife to have a second wife according to Islamic shariah. Also, he should be capable of taking care of them financially and should treat both equally without any discrimination among them.

Here average number of people agree that they experience conflict once a month. Out of the respondents, 63 per cent respondents face conflict once a month. 6 per cent respondents face conflict every day, and 10 per cent face conflict once a week. From the data collected, an average couple face problem once in every month. During the conflict different people react in different ways some use unpleasant languages referring to their partner and choose to stay silent. These kinds of behaviours seem to worsen the situation instead of solving the problem. Most couples have the issues of communication in their marriage, and none of them have taken marriage counselling. Therefore, most couples end up piling up with unresolved conflicts, which leads to dissolution of marriage at times. Majority of the people have highlighted that there is lack of communication between them. Marriage is based on the dependency; partners expect each other's support at their weakest points. Marriage is the horizon of years of work, where individuals develop some skills and neglect others and expect their spouses to fill in where they are weak (Waite 1995).

In a situation which favours the propertied and the man, a woman is in disadvantageous position (DharamVir 2006). In a globalised world where, women want to excel in their life and want to be able to choose a career of their choice, after marriage, it becomes difficult to do so as husband is the decision maker in the family. Among the respondents, 20 per cent have gone through divorced and 10 per cent remarried. It indicates that divorce is a common phenomenon and it is not considered as a taboo in the society today as compared in the traditional society.

Psychological Conditions of the Respondents

This study suggests that among the respondents, none of them have gone through marriage counselling to resolve conflict in their marriage. Some respondents have concern regarding privacy issues, while others are not interested in talking about their personal life with others. It is also estimated that there are no counselling services available in Fuvahmulah. Divorce is social issue which affects both the society and the people involved. To leave such issues unaddressed may lead to increase in conflict leading to dissolution of marriage, effecting the society and the couples as well as kids.

A study conducted by Menaghan Elizabeth, G and Liberman Merton. A (1986), shows the psychological effects of changes of marital status of people. According to this study those who got divorced were not depressed at the initial stage. But four years later, they became depressed. They faced problems like economic problem, deterioration of standard of living, and absence of a close relationship. Traits of such behaviours

are shown in the people of Fuvahmulah as well. According to the analysis, respondents have raised concerns like financial problem and loneliness as stopping them to getting a divorce. women fear the parenthood without a father figure in the family, taking care of the responsibilities financially and emotionally. The crisis among the couples not only affect them, but also the children involved in it. Children are affected in various ways like, the intensity of the conflict between the divorcing parents, the children's attachment to the custodial parent, level of maturity and general personality characteristics, etc (Hawkins. and Lloyd 1976).

Couples Method of Resolving Conflict

Through this parameter, I have analysed what couples opt for while resolving conflict. Whether they solve it themselves by discussing it among themselves or with intervention of family or legal authority or both. Among the respondents, all have mentioned that they resolve conflict through mutual discussion. Only one person has mentioned that family intervention is also there in resolving their conflict. While 100 per cent agrees they discuss among themselves or go for mutual discussion 6 per cent agrees their family is involved in solving the problem. Here it is shown that despite 100 per cent opting for mutual discussion 6 per cent also opt for family intervention. One respondent has agreed that both mutual discussion and family intervention is how they resolve conflict between them. It is estimated that as they are not able to solve conflicts, family was involved in doing so.

Civil Society Interventions for the Betterment of the Divorced Persons

It is found that there are no counselling services provided for the divorced persons or those who seek marriage counselling neither from the State nor from civil society. Although UN has raised concerns over the high divorce rate in Maldives, no initiative has been taken by the State authority to manage these crisis situations.

Marriage being the bedrock of the society create relational ties and community ties resulting in many positive outcomes in the society. Marriage connects both men and women in a large context, encouraging them for love, family commitment, social responsibility, etc. marriage is also the greatest institution which gives social education to the children. It teaches them honesty, civil virtues, responsibility, personal sacrifice, religious involvement, etc. The bond between men and women reflects in the society. Strong institution of marriage creates strong bonding between among the people in the society. Children raised in intact families have more physically and emotionally strong children.

Marriage is a wealth generating institution. The commitment of husband and wife nurtures economic specialization and economies of scale. A society with high divorce rates leads to higher expenses for the government on welfare programs. A strong marriage institution not only benefit the family, but also the society in general.

6. CONCLUSION

Family is the cornerstone of the society. It forms the basic unit of social institution and the function of human society without family is unimaginable. Family is found universally and exist in every society with different institutional norms (Murdock 1949). Industrialization and modernization has led to increase

the number of nuclear families. The struggle for survival led to dispersal of members from home affect the bond between the couples. In Fuvahmulah, the relationships are affected due to widespread western ideologies, which is brought up by the booming tourism industry. From the Marxian analysis of family in a capitalist society developed in 1960s and 1970s by Fredrich Engles, see the family as the unit that produces basic commodity of capitalism, labour (Harlambos and Heald 1980). In a tourism dominated society like Maldives, cheap labour is needed to serve the elites who visit the country. It draws the youth population out of the city exposing the relationships to a critical condition leading to dissolution of many marriages. The family is also affected by the commonised drug use in the Maldivian society which is the result of modernization. As the employment of most men are based outside the city, time given for the relationship are less, leading to conflict due to mismatch of interest just months after the marriage.

The status of women has increased over the years in Fuvahmulah due to the increased in financial autonomy. Job autonomy create the feeling of mastery, which reduces the control over the spouse (Stets 1995). Maldivian women face domestic violence in different forms, be it sexual, physical and emotional (Fulhu 2004). Hence, being independent and having a source of income give women, the strength to stand up for themselves at the time of distress and conflict. However, as the number of divorces increase, it does not mean that number of marriages are decreasing. In a functional perspective, what is functional for one part of the society may be dysfunctional to another part.

7. DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS

Marriage: Marriage is a legal contract between two people who want to spend their life together.

Divorce: Divorce is the dissolution of marriage by a legal procedure.

Court: A person or group of people with the authority to hold legal procedure as per the law and order.

Sharia: Islamic law based on Quran and the practice of the Prophet Mohamed (Hadith and Sunna), prescribing duties which is to be followed by the followers and the actions to be taken for those who refuse to do so.

Mauzun: Judicial procedure of marriage with the presence of bride, groom, bride's father, and two witnesses.

Kulah: When a woman seek divorce from her husband legally through a court.

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