

Family, Marriage and Divorce among Catholics of Central Gujarat*

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The article provides the findings of an empirical study undertaken by the author on Marriage and Family among the Catholics of central Gujarat, one of the western states in India. The research reveals that contrary to popular perceptions, the trend of divorce and break-ups of families are increasing among Catholics, too. After identifying the core factors leading to the souring of marriage bonds as well as the strong points that sustain successful marriages for long years, the author shares his insights in the form of suggestions to parents of future couples as well as religious organizations to take timely and adequate steps to salvage this primary and foundational institution of the society.

- Editor

Despite the missionaries battling over decades to minimize divorce rates through a number of measures, the general perception recently prevailing is that the Catholics have a higher incidence of divorce than that part of the caste that has remained Hindu. The question that needs to be examined, therefore, is whether the reasons for this phenomenon lie in the specific impact on Catholics of secularization, modernization and globalization that has affected all communities differently. This article deals broadly with the family and marriage among the Catholic Christians of rural and urban central Gujarat, with a special focus on the problems of divorce. Family is the seat of shared emotions, relations, and rituals besides being a legal and property-owning unit. At the same time, it is also a production and reproduction unit. Catholic leaders, elders, and religious heads have shown much concern over the rise of divorce rates among the Catholics. Moreover, duration of marriage itself has become short. This article attempts to elicit the causes of divorce and separation from broken marriages and reasons for long lasting marriages from selected respondents.

Democratization of Marriage

Democratization of marriage means that, “More people choose their own partners through pre-marital courtship and as the termination of unhappy marriages divorce becomes more common” (Kaur and Parliwala 2014:20). In the past, arranged marriages were the general norm and love marriages were exceptional. While love marriages are on the rise, one can now think of something in between: “marriage by choice”. The parents can encourage a boy and a girl to go to a marriage fair (*mela*) and engage in an interview and the boy and the girl might decide to marry. It is thus neither an arranged marriage nor a love marriage, but marriage by choice. This choice may be restricted mainly to one’s caste and religion

The problem of divorce is global among Catholics, especially in the West, but our micro study in Gujarat would illustrate the local versions and variations of this problem. Even in the West, the high rate of divorce does not necessarily mean the breakdown of the institution of marriage because the rate of remarriage is also high. There are many cases of serial divorces and serial remarriages. The point to be considered, however, is that in the West, remarriage is an accepted and honorable institution. This is not so among the upper caste traditional Hindus. Remarriage is prohibited for divorced as well as widowed women. The same, however, is not applicable to lower castes and tribes.

The Catholic Church does not grant divorce; it grants annulment, which takes its own time. The Catholics, therefore, often resort to “Family Courts” or to civil courts for divorce as well as to their customary laws to break the marital bond and remarry. The archival data of Marriage Tribunal for all of Gujarat based at Nadiad have been checked to validate this statement. Table 1.1 shows the status and classification of cases filed in Church Tribunal based at Nadiad for the years 2002-2012. The nullification cases are classified under six types: (1) lack of due discretion, (2) force and fear, (3) deceit, (4) total/partial simulation, (5) failure to assume obligations of marriage, and (6) *ratum et non-consumatum*.

Table 1 : Status of Cases Submitted for Nullification of Marriage for different Reasons (2002-2012)

Years	Cases Pending	New Cases	Disposed Cases						
			Lack of Due Discretion	Force and Fear	Deceit	Total / Partial Simulation	Inability to assume Obligation of Marriage	Ratum-et Non-Consummation	Misc.
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2002	65	37	08	00	00	09	01	00	00
2003	84	69	12	01	00	10	01	01	00
2004	128	59	23	04	00	04	00	01	03
2005	152	79	17	01	01	04	00	02	02
2006	204	77	10	03	03	03	00	01	01
2007	260	03	15	04	03	06	00	01	03
2008	232	23	07	02	00	03	02	00	00
2009	241	17	04	01	03	10	06	01	01
2010	232	08	04	02	02	20	00	01	09
2011	202	22	05	02	00	05	00	01	00
2012	211	13	06	02	01	08	02	01	01

Source: Church Tribunal for Gujarat based at Nadiad

Table 1 shows that during 2005 and 2006, 79 and 77 cases respectively were filed for annulment, which decreased to 22 and 13 in 2011 and 2012 respectively. This decrease in the filing for annulment does not mean that the people have started believing “a ratified and consummated marriage cannot be dissolved by any human power or for any reason other than death.” People have started taking the convenient route of family court or resorting to deed of divorce permitted by the prevalent custom of the *paragana*, considered to be legal and valid. Couples have increasingly begun using civil law and the constitution of *paragana* for divorce. This is largely because the Church does not grant divorce.

It is well known that divorce through customary law is prevalent in the Catholic community and, therefore, the document of divorce, executed by the parties and registered either with the Notary or the Sub-Registrar of Marriage, is a valid document of divorce and would validly break the relationship of husband and wife. Due to divorce through customary law as per the constitution of *paragana*, which has legal validity before the High Court of Gujarat, respondents in the study area prefer getting the deed of divorce before remarriage. We have seen that many of the cases filed with the Church Tribunal at Nadiad for annulment of marriage carry the deed of divorce in their petition for annulment. This shows that the Catholics of central Gujarat prefer to have the deed of divorce first and then, just for the sake of religious reasons, come to the Church Tribunal for annulment. One finds that very few cases are filed for annulment at the Church Tribunal at Nadiad before getting remarried.

Empirical Study

On the basis of information on their marital life collected from Catholic respondents marriages are classified into two broad categories, 'broken marriages' and 'working marriages'. Broken marriages refer to those respondents who are either in the process of their divorce or are already divorced. 'Working marriages' include all those couples who have been married for more than ten years. In all, 107 Catholic respondents were taken for the study (69 divorcees and 19 married couples). The rural sites consisted of villages of Fangni, Varasda, Bhetasi, and Dabhan, while urban sites consisted of Anand, Ahmedabad and Vadodara, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents in Rural and Urban Sites

Study Sites	Catholic		
	Men	Women	Total
Fangani	5	6	11
Varasda	6	4	10
Bhetasi	6	6	12
Dabhan	8	3	11
Anand	9	7	16
Ahmedabad	12	10	22
Vadodara	13	12	25
Total	59	48	107

The rural respondents gave a higher degree of cooperation than the urban. It is well known that the literate, well-to-do and urban respondents are usually more closed, secretive, fussy, and less cooperative in giving confidential information on a project of this kind than the rural ones. In many cases, the urban respondents would not even approach the parish priest and divulge or share their marital troubles, and in one case the parish priest too was hesitant to talk about such cases.

Marriage Types

Marriage of children has always been the domain of the elders in the family. Generally, the elders, especially the males (father, grandfather, etc.),

choose marital partners for their progeny. At least a couple of months prior to the wedding (*Lagan*), there is the ceremony of engagement (*Sagai*) whereby a team of five persons from each side visit each other's homes. They share a meal and exchange eleven rupees and a coconut. The Church insists on calling a priest to bless the rings and say the prayer over the couples. Among Catholics, *sagai* is not taken lightly. It is said that one can break a marriage but not a *sagai*.

Lately, selection of partners has undergone some change from arranged marriage to marriage by choice. It is believed that the trend of modernization and urbanization initiated the practice of marriage by choice. However, it is not totally correct as most of the respondents married the person selected by their parents/relatives both in rural and urban areas and among both men and women. As seen from Table 3, 63 cases married the persons chosen by their parents. This shows that parents or family elders still decide partners for their children, especially the women.

Interestingly, one sees that out of the total cases, only 6 persons married the partner of his/her choice. In other words, they had a marriage 'by one's own choice' or love marriage rather than marriage by choice made 'by parents or family' and these love marriages were mainly inter-religious or inter caste marriages. Five of them were women respondents. Such cases highlight the possibility of women being free to select their marital partners and to go for 'marriage by one's own choice', but the trend is very low. Most of the time, they follow their parents' choices.

It is important to underscore, however, that in the 'arranged marriages', parents do seek the consent of the boys or girls before finalizing their matches. Boys and girls are permitted to meet or interact by phone. There is, however, a greater likelihood that children end up marrying the chosen partners, even if they do not like them after such meetings or interactions, due to their parents' wishes. Furthermore, such meetings or interactions are also short. This gives little space for acquiring adequate information about the other partner, but they still go ahead with the proposal for on account of social pressure or the prestige of parents.

Table 3: Distribution of Respondents according to Marriage Type and Mode of Wedding

Marriage Type and Category	Rural			Urban		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
Type of Marriage						
Arranged by the family/married in same religion/caste	17	8	25	22	16	38
Love marriage	0	1	1	1	2	3
Love marriage within religion and caste	0	1	1			
Inter-religious but same caste and arranged marriage	0	1	1			
Total	17	11	28	23	18	41
Mode of Wedding						
Civic rules	0	3	3	1	1	2
Church rules	13	6	19	20	14	34
According to paragana rules	3	0	3	1	0	1
<i>Phoolhaar</i> (wedding by garlanding)	1	2	3			
As per Church and <i>pargana rules</i>				1	1	2
No reply				0	2	2
Total	17	11	28	23	18	41

With respect to the way weddings took place, barring some, all had Church weddings (34 cases). The others went for “civil marriage” (or registered marriage), or married as per caste/*paragana* laws. In three cases, they had wedding by *Phoolhaar* (exchange of garlands), as the Church wedding was not possible.

It is to be noted that a Catholic marriage gets religious approval only if it happens as per Church laws. Some couples however are married as per other laws (civil and other laws) and did not marry as per the Church laws. Such marriages have many advantages as they provide evidence for securing visas, property dealings and other such official work. With respect to divorce, such kinds of marriages have actually helped the respondents in getting divorce with least difficulties. Taking annulment as per Church rules implies long and cumbersome procedure. Besides, the Church does not grant a divorce. The Church also does not solemnize a marriage between persons who are below 18 years of age. All this has made the respondents marry outside the Church, which also makes divorce easier. In some cases, those who had Church marriage have also later gone for civil registration of marriage, and hence like others, it was easier for them to get a civil divorce and did not have to go through the lengthy Church procedure of annulment.

Duration of Marriage

Most religions, including Catholicism, treat marriage as a sacrament. It is also assumed that married couples should remain married till death does them apart. This perception is undergoing drastic changes nowadays, as the rate of couples remaining faithful till the end is decreasing, unlike in the past. The duration of married years of the respondents of broken marriages is shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Distribution of Respondents of Broken Marriages by Duration of Marriage

Duration of Marriage	Rural			Urban		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
From 1 Day to 6 Months	2	1	3	3	4	7
Between 7 Months to 11 Months	6	3	9	4	2	6
1-3 Years	4	3	7	6	5	11
4-6 Years	3	0	3	5	2	7
7-9 Years	-	-	-	4	3	7
More than 10 Years	1	3	4	1	2	3
No Reply	1	1	2	-	-	-
Total	17	11	28	23	18	41

There are 25 respondents who separated from their spouse in less than a year, with negligible variations found between rural and urban areas. And, if we include those married up to three years, then the number increases up to 43, which is more than 60% of the total respondents. This highlights that the duration of married years is growing shorter among the present generation, and couples do not remain married for longer years, rather they split early. On the one hand, the duration of marriage is becoming shorter and, on the other, even after staying together for more than ten years, some persons are moving out of the marital bond.

Our data of broken marriages shows that some have divorced soon after marriage and others after months or a couple of years. One assumption for such early ending of marriage could be that they had arranged marriages, or forced ones. This may be true in the case of women who went ahead with the marriages for the sake of family prestige. Hence, the non-acceptance of the proposal, right from the start, leads a person to take less interest in making his/her marriage a success, which ultimately ends in divorce. One observes that a number of divorces in urban and rural areas have taken place within the initial years of marriage. Thirty-one urban respondents have divorced within six years of marriage, out of which many have divorced in less than a year or within three years (24). Similarly, 22 rural respondents have divorced within six years of marriage and 19 within less than three years. These figures are higher compared to those of the urban.

In terms of gender variation, more men (33) maintain longer years of their marriage as compared to women (20). Divorced men rather than divorced women are easily accepted in the society, and that is why it is easier for men to take divorce rather than the women. Also, compared to men, divorced women are more likely to feel insecure both socially and financially (if not self-sufficient economically) outside the marriage bond. Hence, women may find it difficult to seek divorce on their own. This scenario is changing, however, as nowadays women themselves are deciding to divorce if they find the marital bond is disturbing their lives or personal desires. This is true more for the urban areas than the rural. As women in urban areas are working and are economically secure prior to and after marriage, they seek divorce when their married life is in distress due to different internal or external factors.

Decision-Maker in the Previous Marital Household

It is believed that decision making process involving both partners helps the couple grow in trust and strengthens the marital bond. In the present study, 25 cases said that in their former marital household, the decisions were made along with their spouses (see Table 5). Two respondents (both women) took decision independently without consulting the spouse or other family members. Fourteen of them reported about their spouses as the decision-makers at home. Among them, five are men and nine are women. So, in five cases, it was the women and in nine cases, it was the men who were taking decisions in household matters. The men respondents who said about their wife taking decisions are from the urban areas.

Table 5: Distribution of Decision-Makers in the Respondents Previous-Marital Household

Decision Makers in the Previous Marital Household	Rural			Urban		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
No Reply	1	0	1	0	2	2
Self	-	-	-	-	2	2
Spouse	1	3	4	4	6	10
Both Spouses Together	6	2	8	14	3	17
Parents (Natal)	5	2	7	1	1	2
Parents-in-law	0	3	3	0	5	5
Other in-law Members (Brother/Sister-in-Law (Elder or Younger))	2	0	2	0	1	1
Jointly by Both Spouses and in-laws	1	0	1	2	0	2
Jointly by Self and Parents	1	1	2	-	-	-
Total	17	11	28	23	18	41

In the rest of the cases, decisions for the family affairs were taken along with other household members. There were three women respondents who reported about the involvement of their parents in some decisions.

With respect to household decisions, one finds the involvement of both parents/parents-in-law and also the spouses. This means that nowadays, complete authority of parents over marital life of children may have weakened with the increase in the space of children to take personal decisions. For instance, among the respondents, the household decisions were mostly made jointly with the spouses, with limited role of parents or other household members. This is found to be higher in urban households than the rural. This could be due to their desire to follow their own personal choices. In their marital homes, the couples like to take decisions by themselves or with the spouses and do not like interference of other household members. If their decision is unacceptable to each other, it can cause stress in the relationship between the husband and the wife which

may weaken their marital bond. In the decision making process, one finds that parents are also involved in some of their marital affairs. Their undue involvement in the personal decisions of the couple may lead to frequent frictions among the couple. Especially in a marital household, if a wife's involvement is limited and others are taking decisions, even if they are related to couples themselves, tensions in their marital relationship are bound to increase. Not giving attention to wife's opinions or views in her marital household may also make her think about her insignificant status, leading to disinterest in the marital family and also her bond. Lack of importance to the views/opinions in cases of men of the household may also give rise to the same result if the husband sees that the wife and the others are overpowering him. All this may disturb her/his marital life, and become a cause for seeking divorce from the spouse.

Causes for Divorce

People still hold on to traditional patterns as regards many important matters of marriage. As a norm, arranged marriage was the pattern in India, followed by the families where parents have more say in the selection of partners. Even today, a large number of marriages are arranged. Arranged marriages, at times, lead to marital failure if the adult girl or boy is forced to marry someone with whom he/she is unwilling to marry. If the marriage takes place without a thorough enquiry about the bride/groom and her/his family, it fails. Many youngsters are finding their own life partners and getting married. Parents are also open to the idea of love-marriages now. They are willing to let their children marry the persons they have chosen themselves. It leads to a win-win situation for both, as children are happy to get married to the person of their own choice and the parents, on their part, do not feel responsible if certain problems occur among the couple or if the marriage ends in failure.

Whether marriage 'by choice' or 'arranged', persons seek different things from the marital relationship such as love and companionship, sex, procreation, status, prestige, power and financial security. When these needs are more or less satisfied, it can lead to a harmonious marital relationship. This is possible only if the partners are ready to adjust with each other. According to Koos (1958: 156), adjustment in marriage is the achievement of the expectations of the couple in their marriage. Therefore, important factors in marital adjustment which require couples'

Causes behind Divorce Decision	Urban		
	Men	Women	Total
In-laws interference in marital life of spouses	16	14	30
Irresponsible/ negligent behavior of spouse towards family responsibilities	14	11	25
Money minded nature of the spouse	14	9	23
Suspicious nature of spouse	9	9	18
Emotional blackmailing/ insulting behavior by spouse/family	12	8	20
Differential age and maturity between spouses	8	9	17
Extra-marital relationships of the spouse	7	9	16
Lack of communication between spouses	11	4	15
Arranged marriage or partner chosen by elders	5	9	14
Forced to live separately from marital home by the spouse	12	2	14
Wrong information provided about the spouse at the time of arranged marriage	3	8	11
Alcoholic addiction of spouse	1	9	10
Economic difference between families of spouses	3	5	8
Educational difference among spouses	3	3	6
Adjustment differences in residing together by the spouse	4	1	5
Difference in occupational or income status of spouses	3	2	5
Interference of Church persons in respondents marital life	2	1	3
Incompatibility problem in fulfilling sexual needs by the spouse	1	1	2
Unemployment status of respondents spouse	0	1	1

Note: Responses are multiple choices.

Table 6 shows the list of causes in descending order in the rural sites:

1) Extra-marital relationship of the spouse; 2) In-laws' interference in marital life of spouses; 3) Irresponsible/ negligent behavior of spouse towards family responsibilities; 4) Lack of communication between spouses; 5) Differential age and maturity between spouses; 6) Arranged marriage or partner chosen by elders; and 7) Wrong information provided about the spouse at the time of arranged marriage.

Table 6 also shows the list of causes in descending order in the urban sites:

1) In-laws' interference in marital life of spouses; 2) Irresponsible/ negligent behavior of spouse towards family responsibilities; 3) Money minded nature of the spouse; 4) Suspicious nature of spouse; 5) Emotional blackmailing/ insulting behavior by spouse/family; 6) Differential age and maturity between spouses; 7) Extra-marital relationship of the spouse; 7) Lack of communication between spouses; and 8) Forced to live separately from marital home by the spouse.

One finds variation in the causes of divorce in rural and urban sites as enumerated above. Subsequently, the strategy for handling divorce or pre-empting divorce must be different.

Opinions on their Divorce

To understand the state of mind of the divorced respondents, they were asked about the way they felt about the decision. Their responses showed a mixture of emotions. Even though they chose to go for a divorce, they were not totally happy with their decision. There were 45 respondents expressing content over their divorce decision (more by urban respondents than rural). Some reported that they were happy with their decision and were not troubled by what others would say or their taunts on their divorce. This substantiates the fact that individuals give more value to their own choices and decisions rather than others. However, there were some who felt different. After their divorce, nine respondents had the feeling of being unloved. This feeling must have crept in because they never expected to get divorced and that too in a short period. There were some who felt

that they were seen with sympathy by others. This sympathetic attitude of others was there as the decision of divorce was forced upon them and was not of their own choice.

There are certain matters that require special attention. It was apparent that in the process of divorce, the couples needed psychological support. They needed someone who could understand them and direct them in the right direction. Some stated that they found no support during the time of crises. They had no one with whom they could talk or share their feelings and get proper suggestions to deal with the crises, which they needed the most at that juncture of their life. Though they had their related family members supporting them during that time, still they wanted some mentor or a guiding force strongly at that phase of their life.

Interestingly, some of them also thought of giving up their religion due to divorce and all the problems they faced in married life. This may be because they had lost their faith in the sacredness of marriage. Diverse emotions on their divorce decision put forth the fact that the decision to divorce did not exist in isolation. It influenced their individual life in various ways. It also brought forth the need for supports in married life.

Discussions on respondents of broken marriages (i.e. those who have got divorced, those who are in the process of divorce, those divorced and remarried) suggest that due to several marital problems, persons are unhappy with the marriage and are getting out of it through divorce. They put little effort to mend their problems as many of the issues in the broken marriages could have been reworked. A strong perception also prevails among respondents that the divorce is not a big issue either socially or morally.

The discussion also shows that people do believe in marriage and enter into marital relationships, but sooner or later they decide to part ways. As a concern, one finds that the duration of married years among the couples is drastically decreasing. There are cases where the respondents decided to divorce within a few days or months. It appears that unlike the older generation, the younger generation lacks sufficient skills and qualities to handle their marital problems. The older generation too had their own problems, but they resolved them differently, for they were aware that the family was very important for self and the society at large. Interference of

family members in the married life of children was also found to be an important aspect that leads to the breakdown of marriage.

It appears that the decision to divorce might be a better idea for those who were badly treated even after sincerely performing their expected married roles and responsibilities. But for others, taking divorce just for the sake of it is of concern; as, such incidence in the long run would harm the institution of marriage itself. If this happens, it will decline the role of marriage and family which is crucial for individuals in particular and society in general.

Religiosity and Divorce

In most religions, marriage is considered to be sacred. Due to this, people try to maintain the marital bond as long as possible, as breaking it would cause guilt. In this regard, one can notice that religious value of marriage is losing its ground as, nowadays, persons are easily ending it at any phase of their married life. People marry and divorce in a fast changing world without understanding the institution of marriage itself. The growth of individualism, modernity, globalization, lack of patience and rapid changes in society can be seen as some factors that have affected marriage to a large extent. This means that the stability of marriage among the couples has decreased. Persons no longer want to remain married just for the sake of its sacredness. The willingness to let go or forgive is missing among many of the couples today. The respondents too felt the same as almost 49 persons felt that in general marriage has lost its religious significance. Only 20 still believe in the sacredness of marriage. Many also felt that two important attitudes of 'letting go' and 'forgiving' which existed in previous generations were no more prevalent in the couples today. These attitudes among them helped in greater sustainability of marriages. Moreover, in previous generations, there was also rigidity in the caste and marriage rules that inhibited a person to end it. Such rigidity allowed them to stick to the bond and to deal with the marital problems over time for the sake of self, family, in particular and the marriage institution, in general.

Many of the respondents felt that the religious significance of marriage has lost its hold in today's world and in their lives too. Yet, in the study, we found a contrary opinion: 55 respondents confirmed that by divorcing,

they had sinned and around 61 felt that they had broken the religious sacrament. If they had lost the religious significance of marriage, there would have been little chance of guilt feeling. Only 14 and 18 respondents did not feel that by divorcing they had committed any sin or broken any religious sacrament respectively.

It is also observed that divorced respondents who believed in the sacredness of marriage were living with guilt or thought that they were culpable of not adhering to religious standards. They, at the same time, also believe that personal happiness is more important than religious beliefs. Therefore, they went for divorce, thus giving more value to felt satisfaction rather than sticking to the invisible religious pie.

One may think that these two perceptions, viz., ‘divorce is not a big issue’ and ‘strong religious feeling for the sacrament of marriage’ are contradictory. But they do co-exist among our respondents.

Forty one respondents, along with their spouses, had attended marriage preparation course. In general, they believed that such a program had helped them for marriage and its responsibilities. However, one may have to have a focused probe about the character of the course itself. For, few of those who attended such courses have divorced or are having troubled married lives. If they had appreciated the course then what factors led them to divorce?, is the question that needs to be seriously examined.

Reasons for Long Married Years

When the couples of ‘working marriages’ were asked about the secrets behind their long married years, the women respondents said that the love that they had for each other kept them glued to one another. In addition to it, some felt their acceptance of marriage as a religious sacrament was what kept them together. Some women even gave credit to the values and trust inculcated in them by their parents towards the institution of marriage for keeping them together. The women also felt that trust and understanding helped them to cope with all kinds of difficulties that they had to face in their married life. Those having children expressed that for the sake of their children they tried to overcome their problems and issues. They were aware that separation might have adverse effect upon their children and they did not want them to suffer because of them.

Even in the cases of men respondents of 'working marriages', love towards each other was seen as an important factor that helped in sustaining marriage. Compared to women, few men gave value to the religious sacrament that marriage holds along with love (i.e. two men respondents out of nineteen). Like women, men also felt that fulfillment of duties, adjustment, understanding, trust and forgiveness were needed for a long and happy married life. A few used words like *javabdari*, (responsibility), *samajdari* (understanding) and *vafadari* (loyalty). Long years of married life imply that the couples have been faithful to the values inculcated by their parents and they want to maintain the sacredness of marriage like their parents.

Responses of men and women of 'working marriage' clearly show that long duration of their marriage was to a certain extent the result of social control and religious expectations. The respondents, more or less, view marriage as a sacrament and carry out their roles and responsibilities religiously with a hidden fear of facing some repercussions if they go against their religious faith.

Furthermore, it was also found that among all couples, except one, the husbands were very much sharing the household responsibility along with their wives. They were contributing to the family by performing household tasks such as purchasing household goods, helping in some household work, taking care of children and also dropping and picking up their spouses from office. The women appreciated the help given by their husbands as it reduced their workload and it strengthened their relationship. It was also observed that in general all the decisions in the family were taken jointly by the spouses and in some cases the parents (that of husband) played an important part.

Lessons from the Couples of Working Marriages

Insights from the couples of 'working marriages' undoubtedly highlight certain lessons that one can learn for the sustainability of marriage. Sustainability in marriage depends on how couples handle conflicts, tensions, problems and tribulations. Those of the 'broken marriage' category failed to handle them well while those of the sustainable marriages have succeeded in handling them.

1. It is believed that early age marriage has advantages as young girls adjust to life with the marital family better while late marriages are riddled with conflicts. Among our respondents, some even married before they attained the age of 18 years. If marrying at a certain age was the part that helps in sustaining marriage, then those respondents who married young from broken marriages should have held on to the marriage. But it did not happen and the marriage ended in divorce. This somehow points to the fact that apart from age and maturity at marriage, there are other elements that are also essential for a long and happy marriage.
2. It was found that barring some, all of the respondents from 'broken marriages' had an arranged marriage and many of them considered it as one of the multiple causes behind their seeking divorce. The respondents of 'working marriage' also had the arranged marriage but it did not cause problems in their married life. So, to assume that arranged marriage causes dissatisfaction and divorce among persons is hard to believe.
3. Compared to marriage arranged by family, marriage by self-choice is preferred by the present generation. Marriage by self-choice is expected to last long as one is married to the person by one's own decision. As they selected their spouses, it is expected that they would work hard for the marriage to succeed. If one sees this in the context of the present study, it does not hold true for all the love marriages. Some were faithful (seen in cases of working marriages) and some were unfaithful and divorced (seen in 'broken marriages').
4. In 'broken marriages', men respondents complained that their spouses were not doing household work because they were employed. Irresponsible behaviour of their wives towards household duties is a cause leading to parting of ways. However, in the case of 'working marriage', the situation was different. Those whose wives were employed said that despite being working women, they were also aware of their responsibilities towards their marital homes and were balancing both the home and the workplace properly. Further, they did not show any signs of personal ego with respect to their earning or employed status. This suggests that if one wants, one can manage both job and household duties without harming one's marital

relationship. For a stable marriage, one should not encourage the ego of 'employed status' to come in between the married life.

5. One finds a commonality between respondents of 'broken and working marriages' in terms of facing of certain hardships in their marital life. But the latter chose not to bring in negative impact of these hardships on their relation and their children. They did not want children to suffer because of their personal matters. Such determination to remain together and to reconcile their personal matters was, however, found absent among the persons from 'broken marriages'.
6. It is believed that it is better to sort out different problems and upheavals in one's marital life as soon as possible so that one can avoid strained marital relations as it could lead to separation and divorce. Communication and spending quality time with each other are crucial to develop a deep bond. In our study, such bond was found among the working marriage couples and its absence was visible in many of the respondents of broken marriages. Respondents of broken marriages have reported about lack of time and communication between partners and one can presuppose that it has somehow distanced them from each other. Couples not discussing openly and communicating their apprehensions about marital problems with each other and the household members furthers their separation. Unlike them, respondents of 'working marriage' were communicating their marital concerns and came out with better solutions to their problems. Unlike 'broken marriage' respondents, the couples of 'working marriage' tried to discuss and solve problems mutually.
7. Couples of 'working marriages' have said that their parents are an important support system in their married life. This is so as they rarely had any problem with them. But in the case of 'broken marriages', the parents (especially the parents of the brides) were non-supportive in their children's married life. Due to their lack of support and unnecessary interference, the respondents of 'broken marriages' did not have a sound parental supporting system. Their negative involvement had resulted in conflicts leading to divorce of the respondents from their spouse (which is especially true about the parents of the bride).

8. An important feature highlighted by 'working marriage' couples was that of respect and forgiveness. These were, however, lacking among the respondents of the 'broken marriages' and somehow their marriage ended in divorce.

Marriage is the most complex institution of social relationships. It is a journey that two people undertake which may be undulating and filled with many challenges. Coping with such challenges together by adjustment, patience, understanding and each other's support can create a loving and healthy environment in which marriages are sustained and grow, as seen from the above discussions of the life of couples of 'working marriage'. The four most important features that were experienced and which summarize the durability of marriage among couples of 'working marriage' include: 1) full responsibility towards the new role of 'being married'; 2) understanding and supporting one another on all occasions; 3) being trustful/loyal towards the spouse; and 4) religiosity towards marriage bond. Keeping these traits in mind has enabled the couples of the 'working marriage' to have a long and contented married life. The couples were happy with the way they fulfilled their duties and dealt with marital issues thus making their married life perfect. The above mentioned features were missing in the lives of persons of broken marriages. One can thus assume that the lack of these features led to the inability in handling the marital conflicts in a healthier way which finally ended in divorce for those belonging to the category of broken marriages.

Suggestions and Recommendations for Stakeholders

I. Suggestions for Parents

1. Forced marriage is seen as an important cause of the divorce. People have decided to divorce soon after marriage as it was forced upon them or because they married the person 'arranged' by parents or others. To avoid this, parents should take care that they should not force their children into marriage. In the long run, it will not succeed as children might not accept the partner and there is likelihood that they would try to break it. So, it would be better on the part of parents to respect children's opinions and views with respect to their marriage and also give them space in selecting their own partners. If their

willingness is present then there is a high chance that they would respect the marital bond and would follow marriage responsibility religiously.

2. Parents should also be aware that hiding any information about their children might go against their marriage if it comes out at later stages. So, it is better to put forward correct information about the bride/groom beforehand and then proceed further.
3. Parents should not unduly interfere with the marital life of their children unless their involvement is appropriate and needed. Unnecessary interference of parents -- directly or indirectly — can become a reason for marriage to end in divorce (as seen among broken marriages). It can distance the couples leading to strained and conflict-ridden relationship, making divorce an easy recourse. As parents, they should be careful that their actions or sayings should not negatively impact their children's marriage and in case it happens then they should immediately rectify it.
4. In the development process of the household from simple to complex, and then to simple, the parents must anticipate different conditions, given the number of sons and daughters. As mentioned earlier, filial and fraternal ideals are ideals but pragmatic approach to separation of married son with children when the second son is getting married is desirable. When anticipated, this separation is amicable and not followed by conflicts and toxic ill will.

II. Suggestions for Couples

1. Marriage preparation course with credible inputs by lay elders, clinical inputs by sexologists and counselors, and inputs by priests about the grandeur of Catholic marriage must be a *sine qua non* before marriage.
2. After getting married, the couple should discuss with each other their problems in marital relationship. Such discussions would help them to come to some conclusions of their marital issues. This will also help in minimizing problems and external interferences.
3. There are chances that many of the causes that persons come up with for the divorce, are the ones which, if given a proper thought, can be

solved by them. There may be some genuine reasons for which divorce is a must as the couples cannot take on the marital relationships, but for others, taking divorce without first putting efforts to solve them, is not right. Before taking the final decision to divorce, they should also take note of their eventual old age and of old age of their parents. They should give proper thought to how their decision would affect their parents, children or themselves in the long run. Such thinking is imperative as it can help in sustaining a person's marriage.

III. Suggestions for Religious Organizations

1. It was found that visits of Fathers/Sisters to Catholic homes are decreasing. Therefore, it is required that they should increase their interaction. This has its advantage in the sense that they will be informed of the happenings in the household. Being aware of the problems and giving appropriate solutions to the household would be helpful. It will not only reduce the household problems but will also build further trust and faith in Fathers/Sisters in particular and the Church in general.
2. The Church authorities need to become aware of the rising rate of divorce among Catholics and its causes. They have to take necessary steps to curb this trend and help couples to remain faithful to their marriage partners. At present, many Catholics find the rules and regulations of the Church as regards marriage and its nullification cumbersome and a few are leaving the Church and finding refuge in other religious denominations. For example, those who have married outside the Church and taken civil divorce are not allowed to receive communion. These members are forced to move out of Catholicism and this means losing the numbers. At present, it is easier to get a divorce outside the Church so why would anyone go through the difficult Church process for nullifying the marriage? The Church has to look into this matter, and either amend its rules or find out ways to cope with the problem of marriage and divorce.
3. Marriage Preparation Courses are very important to prepare the couples for their married life. At present, these programs are

conducted mainly by the Fathers and Sisters who may not have first-hand experience of the intricacies involved in married life. More elders who have been married for longer years could be involved in conducting such preparation programs along with Fathers/Sisters. The involvement of the lay elders is important because they could be role models for the youngsters who are about to marry. The elders have faced several issues in their married life and have overcome them in their own way. These experiences of handling their married life could help the youngsters attending the Marriage Preparation Course to deal with issues that may arise in their married life. Another important aspect of involving elders is the fact that the youngsters find it comfortable to connect and speak with them rather than the Fathers/Sisters as regards marital issues. Certified clinical psychologists' and counselors' presence in these programs would be an added benefit for the persons coming there.

4. Apart from the involvement of elders in the Marriage Preparation Courses, the subject taught in the programs should be revised and adapted from time to time to meet the requirements of the current situation. The programs should be more practical in nature and impart skills to deal with marital life and issues that may arise in future. It is recommended that the programs could involve subjects important to the married partners like interpersonal skills, communication skills, medical counseling, coping skills, anger and stress management, and so on. As sex plays an important role in marital life and its strengthening, incorporating a brief section on sex-education in the preparation course can be taken for consideration.
5. While talking to the respondents, especially of those from broken marriages, it was reported that at the time of marital crisis, they looked for a mentor or a person who could have guided them at that juncture so that they could have reworked their marriage. But they did not find such a person and finally they went for divorce. It is, therefore, suggested that, if possible, the Church could have different counseling centres or counseling sessions with certified psychologists to help the marital couples in need.
6. Sexual aspirations and behaviour between husband and wife are an important aspect of the marriage union. Considering the role of media,

technology, etc., sexual desires among the current generation have changed radically, as the survey conducted by *India Today* shows. Hence, clinical knowledge of sex needs to be imparted in the Marriage Preparation Courses.

7. Training is held for parents-in-law of candidates for marriage. “*Vevai Melas*” are being held in other communities. In the case of the Catholics, parents of both the girls and the boys have to be made the focus of greater attention in such awareness camps. It is there that the pathology of bride price can be successfully uncovered and treated.
8. Married couples should be called for a review of their married life after a year or two or with some frequency, as, for instance, after getting a child. This would be helpful as one finds that disturbances in marriage occur mostly after a year or two. So, having a review of their marital life at this juncture would be useful to move ahead in their marriage.
9. Divorced couples should be considered for the reception of Eucharist. This is a doctrinal issue which has come in for global debate and it has led to defiance in the German Church. The Pope has shown sympathy and has called for mercy and compassion to divorced couples. He has said that the Church should be a field hospital!
10. *Ratum-et-Non-Consummatum* is dissolution of marriage when consent has been validly exchanged but sexual consummation of the marriage has not occurred. Canon Law gives precise prescriptions to verify if consummation has taken place. But these prescriptions appear to have been made prior to the birth of contraceptive technology and may not be relevant or applicable now. One may have sexual intercourse through the intervention of these technologies and yet claim *Ratum-et-Non-Consummatum* and apply for nullity of marriage. The Church Tribunal may be better placed to articulate this phenomenon.

Before dispensation can be granted the bishop must “prepare a *votum* on the veracity of the fact of the non-consummation, the just cause for the dispensation, and the suitability of the favor.” In the process of preparing the “instruction” on the basis of which the bishop is to

prepare his *votum*, the “defender of the bond” must intervene (Cans. 1704 §1, 1701 §1). It is abundantly clear that the dissolution of a marriage *ratum-et-non-consummatum* is not a simple declaration of nullity.

11. Given the rising number of divorces in the global Catholic Church, it is said that American dioceses have granted backdoor divorces through liberal use of annulments to contain the situation. If a quicker revision on divorce is not made, maybe there would be more Catholics outside the Church than inside.

Addressing the Vatican court primarily responsible for hearing requests for marriage annulments, Pope Francis said that judges on Church tribunals should show “imperturbable and impartial balance” as well as the “delicacy and humanity proper to a pastor of souls”. The Pope made his remarks on 24.1.14 to officials of the Roman Rota at a meeting to inaugurate the tribunal’s judicial year.

“You are essentially pastors,” he told the officials. “As you carry out your judicial work, do not forget that you are pastors. Behind every file, every position, every case, there are persons who wait for justice”.

12. This report may be discussed with pastors, family court lawyers, caste elders, *samadhan* cells and youth groups in parishes and arrive at means of raising support structures for making marriages sustainable.

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