

From incomparable to Incompatible.

I got divorced. There was no thunder. No lightning. No loud protesting mobs. And no!! The earth did not open and swallow me up either. Just a bespectacled judge, in a stuffy courtroom, who put us through a series of verifications mostly requiring the answers yes, or no!! ALAS!! Love is the quest. Marriage, the conquest. Divorce the inquest!!!

To the amusement of many curious onlookers, I caught my now ex-husband's hand tightly, and walked down 4 floors hand in hand. At the car, I thanked him for the 12 years and all the good moments within it, and a tight, long, warm hug later, I was on my way home, a single woman. The only unusual and irksome detail was that it happened to be Valentines Day. Shops displays were festooned with flowers and heart shaped balloons and every single radio station was belting out romantic songs, punctuated with proclamations of undying love and passion from lovers to one other. Murphy's Law. Whatever has to go wrong, will go wrong and it will choose the worst possible time to do so.

I am told that my case is exceptional. (Despite the fact that it was mutual consent). That divorces are filled with bitterness, hostility and rancor. I think a large part of that negativity stems from societal pressure, and the trepidation at being frowned upon. Divorcee, especially for a woman, is still a bad word. She is catching the flight to freedom (how dare she!!!) On non-virgin airways, and probably has baggage, labeled children. The fact that most women in society are entirely economically dependent on their husbands makes matters worse. Because then in order to acquire a monetary settlement, they have to prove they've been wronged. And it's time for a mud fight!! Slander, lies, or sometimes even the truth, can be most hurtful and a setback to a woman in a reputation conscious society. Thankfully, perspectives are gradually changing.

Today's rising divorce statistics are not symbolic of a fickle, capricious, and amoral younger generation. Nor, that they lack depth, staying power or respect for the institution of marriage. It has a lot to do with economic empowerment. Increasing numbers of Women can now make that choice for themselves. They are no longer dependent on their fearful family's

Pooja Bedi

decision to “accept” them back into their folds. They stay married because they want to, not have to. Nobody deserves to be stuck in a relationship that is loveless, barren, abusive, neglectful or sadistic. Irreverence is when you treat marriage like a broken toy to be junked without consideration, and go out to get yourself a new one. But if despite counseling, family support and serious attempts at rehabilitating a broken down marriage what remains is a shell housing two embittered individuals, it’s every person’s RIGHT to change their reality.

TV, travel, books, newspapers, magazines have created an awareness of the world out there waiting to be explored, that attitudes are changing, and that emotional abuse is just as harmful as physical abuse. In urban society, the transition from joint families into a nuclear family system, has taken away the tremendous daily pressure of old world hostility towards the “catastrophical curse” called divorce. Women are educated, working, and their economic independence raises their sense of self worth. They no longer are willing to walk two steps behind. (Now when you see an urban married couple coming down the street, the one two or three steps ahead is the one who’s angry!) The Indian woman is evolving. She is saying no to dowry, no to sati, she is willing to register rape and fight it in a courtroom. A bad marriage is just as physically and emotionally hurtful. Why should she suffer it in silence?

There is no format for a happy marriage. But there is a way out of an unhappy one. It’s called divorce. And no, it’s not bad karma to do so. People who get married for the wrong reasons will be divorced for the right reasons.

A lot of people stay in marriages, “for the sake of the children”. Nothing more banal than that statement. Children learn from example. If you teach them life is suffering, that will be their reality. To be in a dysfunctional, vacuous marriage and to display that as an exemplary exhibit of a must emulate virtues called endurance and sacrifice is pitiable.

My parents were divorced. I turned out fine. If I’m a strong, positive, self sufficient, well traveled, educated woman today, it’s because my parents wanted the best for me. And, it didn’t have to be at the cost of wanting less

Pooja Bedi

for themselves. They divorced each other, not their children. I learnt from their example. My children are not pawns, nor their custody a weapon. I choose to enter and exit the emotional battlefield of my marriage with dignity, because the bond which comes with our children is life long. We are equally touched by their tears, equally exhilarated by their achievements, equally intoxicated by their love. He will ALWAYS be their father, and I their mother. The minute I turn grand mom, he turns granddad. Today, I share a very healthy relationship with my ex-husband. We discuss our lives on the phone, occasionally take our kids out together for a fun lunch, play bumper cars, laugh hysterically through a game of air hockey, and are proud of each others successes. It is possible. Yes, a divorce is the death of a dream. But if the marriage is not to be, you can't resent a person or the institution, just because things didn't go your way. How tragic to end something that began with so much love, hope and happiness with spite, malice and self pity. They say the experiences of life should make us better, not bitter. To quote Michael Jordan: "I can accept failure. Everyone fails at something. What I can't accept is not trying." It is with positivism and enthusiasm that I advocate marriage. Everybody should be married. At least once!!!