Chapter 3

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Reflections in the form of narratives on the past experiences bring back many memories, including those subtle ones. Study of these reflections puts one in two places – the memory in the context of the past situation and the same memory in the present context. The moment of despair and tears in the past may seem funny at present and may be narrated lightly whereas certain moments which seemed so ordinary that time may be filled with emotions and nostalgia at present. So, phenomenological study of these past experiences gives one a paradoxical sensation, because memories play a confusing role. It makes a person smile on remembering the time he cried and makes him cry on remembering the time he laughed.

When it comes to women with AIDS, they cannot help but remember those memories which are responsible for their present condition. These memories are taken as milestones which they encountered to reach their present. Those days of sweet moments were loathed but instead, they found the scolding they got that time as sweet experiences. The present chapter deals with those past experiences and the meanings that they gave to them.
3.1. Courtship

Most of the women under study went through romantic courtships with their husbands before marriage. But there was a level of seriousness of the relationship that they went through. The seriousness of the relationship was not consistent.

Courtship, which often ends in marriage, is one important milestone in life. When they reflected back, the words which came out were, “I was just having fun”, “I was not serious at all”, “we did not date for long”, “I did not love him actually”, etc. Those meetings, dating for the sake of fun or just for the heck of it seemed so futile, a mistake they should never have committed. Treading upon those yesterdays of youth and fun made them reflect upon their decisions and the choices they made in life. While some still stood firm and unchanged upon their past decisions, many of the women cursed themselves for being so naive during those days of courtship.

Analysis of those reflections bring up these themes.

3.1.1. Flirting

Flirting or not being serious in a relationship was very often come across among the Meitei women. Their kind of courtship was very different from other women under study. Sometimes, one woman dated 3 – 4 men at one go. One such woman shared her experience:
I had many boyfriends that time — from different ‘leikai’ (locality). There was one boyfriend for snacks, the other for roaming together with, another one for movies. Like this, we used to keep different categories for different purposes.

Another woman also added,

I had 2 - 3 boyfriends at one go. This was very helpful. If one was busy, there were some other men I could look up to. If I wanted to take out someone for work also, I always had someone handy (laughs).

While some women had multiple boyfriends to serve their purposes, some women stayed in a relationship just for the sake of having a boyfriend. One woman who did that committed, "I was not in love with him. I was flirting actually. I was not serious at all".

But what made them go for the pick at the end? Or what was so special about the men whom they chose? This was how they justified themselves:

The reason I chose him from all the others... I don't know (smiles). He was very stubborn. Maybe that's why. He happened to be someone whom I dated very frequently. And you know these wayward guys? They are so romantic.
- said the same woman who kept different categories among her boy friends.

Going head over heels over romantic men was also the reason why another Meitei woman made her choice for husband. She said,
I simply got drifted towards my husband. Somehow, we became closer to each other. We dated very often and so, I could not give time to anybody else. He often came to my college to meet me. He was a real romantic guy. He really knew how to treat a woman. So, I got carried away.

One Meitei woman confessed that she even ditched her boyfriend and married someone else because the latter was very witty and very humourous. That was the reason why she married him without being in love.

A Rongmei woman aged 29 years, was also one who was not serious about relationship. Her family ran a liquor shop and her husband used to be their regular customer. Later, they began to date. She said that she was not serious about such things as love or relationships. She was living a carefree life until she got eloped with him.

Relationship at young age can become serious though they started out at a complacent manner. A 36-year-old Meitei woman recalled,

I was very young... around 17 or 18 years that time. I was not serious about our relationship I said 'yes' to him because I was scared of him. I came out to meet him not out of love but out of fear. I used to be so afraid of him.

On the other hand, good looks can be very tempting. And indeed, in this temptation, a 32-year-old Kuki woman fell into. She confessed,
I was dating someone and I got eloped with someone else. One special thing about him was that he was very handsome.

She justified herself,

In younger days, one is attracted towards good looks, isn’t it? But later, we got divorced. Simply like that... I got married again.

One Muslim woman also got married with her boyfriend simply because he was very good looking though she was not serious about their relationship.

Following the above discussion, the Meitei women were more into not-so-serious relationship. The women of other cultural groups also had their own share of ‘fun’ but this trend is more prevalent amongst the Meitei women. The reason may be due to a particular trend as said by one of them. She explained that it was fashionable to have boyfriends because it only showed that a woman was beautiful and admired. So, having boyfriends was taken as an achievement, an asset which added more feathers to their caps. While some of them were not serious about their boyfriends, some were dead serious about it and were so carried away that nothing could stop them. This category of women is discussed under the following theme.

3.1.2. Lost in love

Being lost in romantic ideas and romantic men were found among women of different cultural groups. One Muslim woman narrated,
My family was totally against him. He was crazy, he was stubborn. He meant what he said. He once cut his finger and sent it to me. When I refused to come out to meet him, he cut another one also. He wrote letters to me with his blood. He said that he’d even cut his head off if I didn’t marry him. So, I ran away with him. When he did all these, I was convinced that he really loved me and my love for him increased.

But for a 23-year-old Kuki woman, she found true love in her husband when he fought with others for her sake. When he first proposed to him, she was totally against him. Besides that, her mother had arranged for her a man who was studying MBBS at RIMS (Regional Institute of Medical Science, Imphal). When she learnt that the person whom she rejected bore the pain and dared to fight with others for her sake, she was touched.

Such acts of ‘heroics’ was a turning point in their relationship. When it comes to relationships, some women can be so blinded by love and could get easily carried away in emotions. A 27-year-old Rongmei woman, who eloped with the younger brother of her brother-in-law, was forcibly separated by her parents, the reason being that the man was a drug-addict. But that did not stop her from running back to her husband, not just for the second time, but also for the third and the last time. She unfolded her story,

He had a very sad childhood. He lost his mother when he was still very young. He had a very sad, unsatisfied childhood. His elder siblings also did not take much care of him. So, I was full of compassion for him. Even though I knew about his involvement in drugs before our marriage, I wasn’t scared or anything
like that. I loved him so much that I wanted to mend his ways. I was more concerned with his emotions than his disease.

Some women, even though they were aware of their boyfriend's involvement with drugs continued with their relationship. According to them, they continued because they wanted to reform them, change their bad habits. Such acts of heroics or bravery costed them a lot in return. One of them was a 33-year-old Muslim woman. She said, "When I learnt about his involvement in drugs during our courtship, I thought I would reform him from his bad ways once we got married". It was found out that she regretted her decision. She admitted that it was due to lack of awareness. She thought that the case of drug addict were just like the case of alcoholics, in the sense that they could become normal again once they stopped taking drugs.

Some women got captivated by the idea of romance and love. One Meitei woman of 35 years narrated how she fell into the ditch of romance;

When we went to Kathmandu for excursion, he was following me everywhere. He proposed to me but I didn't accept his proposal. Sometimes he was drunk too but I thought it was because he was frustrated with my attitude. He also deposited his money with me lest he spent everything. I found that very sweet. But now, I realize that he was doing that just to woo me.

Many women married against their parents' wishes. They dated to become a rebel in the eyes of their family. All this was done out of love. A Kuki woman of 33 years of age shared her emotions;
My mother scolded me for dating a man from different tribe but I turned a deaf ear to her. He was so romantic. He could really talk; I got swept off my feet with his talks.

Ultimately, she ended up with him. She got eloped with him against the will and wish of her family. She took the biggest decision of her life, the decision which she later regretted very much.

One thing that comes to notice is that all these women were very young when they got married. Their ages were in the range of 15 – 25 years and when they were in those romantic relationships, they were very young, naïve and their decisions were immature. The beauty of romance and love got the better of their rational thinking. So, irrespective of their cultural background, those women, were easily lured in their adolescence and allowed themselves to be duped by such acts of immature expression of love. But looking at a glance, the Muslim women were found to be more exposed to such experiences. The other area where most women neglected was the amount of time devoted in knowing and learning about each other. This is learnt from their narrations as follows in the next theme.

3.1.3. Not enough time to know each other

It is often said that couples take an entire lifetime to know and discover each other. Just a mere knowing of a name is simply not sufficient to surrender oneself into a bond of marriage. Unfortunately, many women did not spend much time and devote attention to know the
person they were courting. One Rongmei woman of 29 years of age
dated her boyfriend for only one month. She realized that she had
committed a big mistake. She loathed herself.

We dated for about a month only. I didn't enquire
much about his background - his family, his past life,
nothing.

The realization came after they eloped. She had to adjust herself so
much - with her husband, her in-laws, her new house. When she
realized that she had to earn for the family as her husband was a
vagabond and was also a drunkard, she cursed herself for that one
month of romantic trance.

A 37-year-old Tangkhul woman narrated how she met her
husband at Imphal when she came to stay at her sister's house to learn
type writing. She was new to the place. A common friend introduced him
to her. They dated for about two months only. She said,

I didn't know anything about him and his
background. He was from different community (Meitei).
He didn't tell me also. But then, what can one learn
from two months? I didn't love him actually but he was
stubborn and I went along with his wish.

Later, her husband got involved with another woman from whom
he got infected HIV and also infected her in return. This was what she
got from her marriage, as she said.

Another woman, a Meitei woman of 36 years of age regretted
that she spent less time to know about her husband. Like the previous
case, she was introduced to him by a common friend. They dated for sometime. She did not have any knowledge about his past record of drug-addiction. She ran away with him because he was stubborn and she could not resist his nagging. At that point of time, his stubbornness, his possessiveness added fuel to his romantic nature. She found that sweet. But much later, she realized that he was doing all that under the influence of drugs.

Like them, there were many women who went around with their boyfriends for a short time. Some dated for only 3 – 4 months, some for about a year. One Meitei woman realized that one should not only talk about romantic stuffs during courtship. She said that it was very important to inquire about the person one was dating, not only from the person himself but also from his friends and people of his locality. She even insisted that one should visit their house if possible.

Not having enough time to know each other is often held as an excuse for their failed marriage and also for their present sufferings. This is often found among the women belonging to Rongmei, Tangkhul and Meitei community. Such an allegation is not found to be mentioned by the Kuki and Muslim women. Unlike the women of the former three communities, they did not loathe themselves for not spending enough time to know their spouses. Courtship often ends into marriage. But marriage itself shows many faces and women across the cultures shared many similar as well as diverse experiences. Their experiences, their
reflections and realizations are discussed under the topic – ‘Marriage’ as follows:

3.2. Marriage

Marriage is a crucial point in life. It is a life-changing experience – some for better and some for worse.

The women under study had all tasted marriage. Out of 25 women, five were still married, there was one divorcee and the rest were widows. Two women, one Tangkhul and one Muslim married twice. The age range at which they got married was 13 – 26 years with a mean of 19.5 years.

Analysis of their experiences on their marriage shows that marriage indeed was the turning point of their life. The following themes came out.

3.2.1. A Big Mistake

Many women under study got married against their parents’ wishes. In fact, a huge percentage of 76 did that. According to one of them, love was a powerful motivation which gave them the courage to become a rebel in the eyes of their parents and family. But later, when reality bit, they were filled with remorse and guilt. This ‘reality’ could be in the form of problems like poverty or betrayal or tortures from in-laws or HIV/AIDS.
A 37-year-old Tangkhul woman got married to a man from Meitei community. From the beginning their marriage stood on a shaky foundation. Both the families – hers and her husband’s were against their marriage. Her in-laws did not want a tribal woman as their daughter-in-law and her family was against her husband who was from different faith and community. When her parents came to take her back, she refused and chose to stay behind. So, they cut off all ties with her. Later she lamented,

My in-laws scolded me every now and then. Since they did not like me, they could not tolerate me. I bore that with courage and hope that they’d stop all these one day. I was strong enough because of my husband’s love for me. But later, my husband left home for other woman and refused to come back. That time, I realized how true my parents were and how wrong I was. All my hopes crashed with my husband’s infidelity.

Marriage is an eye-opener. When poverty strikes, romance dies out. One Kuki woman who married against her mother’s advice was one victim of courtship romance. She shared her experience,

My mother was deadly against our marriage but we went ahead and eloped. He could really hypnotize me with his words. I got carried away. When we were newly married, I said to him, “What have you fed me that I love you so much?” He also said, “I think you’ve put me under a spell that I can’t live without you”. But later, when I began to realize the things that were lacking in the house, I began to get angry. They were so poor. His mother sold meat and we lived on that income only. So life was very difficult. We used to fight very often because of that (poverty and hardship).
At the same time, tortures given by in-laws could really take away the romance out of one’s life. When this torture is added with husband’s unfaithfulness, it becomes unbearable. A Meitei woman of 36 years of age eloped with her husband just before her class XII examination and her mother was also unwell that time. So, her family was very angry with her. She cursed the day she ran away with him.

The life that she was living was enough to make her regret her decision. This is what she disclosed:

My family was against my marriage. I was not given blessing and accepted back even after the birth of my second child. I was not allowed to enter my parents’ house. My mother-in-law is very cruel. She tortures me a lot. She and her son team up and beat me very often. My husband is a drunkard, a good for nothing fellow. He does not receive love or respect from his family or from anybody. My mother-in-law would sit on the verandah and scold me always, from morning till night. I couldn’t even go out to wash my children’s clothes.

Those other women who got married with their parents’ wish or went for arranged marriage also regretted for marrying the person of their parents’ choice. The reason behind was that they became HIV positive and were suffering from AIDS from their husbands. Being HIV positive was an irreparable damage which they had been fated with.

Three women went for arranged marriage. Inspite of having boyfriends, they went along with their parents’ wishes. And in return for their obedience, they got infected from their husbands whom their parents had approved. One of them, a Tangkhul woman said,
My marriage was an arranged one. He was my parents’ choice. I hardly knew him when I married him. After marriage, my problems started. He had many hidden bad habits. He drank alcohol, he took drugs. I could never forgive him for his addiction. My heart was very heavy and burdened. When I was detected as HIV positive, I could not forgive him and my parents as well. I was faultless, blameless. They made me suffer like this.

A 45-year-old Kuki woman had to dump her boyfriend to marry her husband. For her too, marriage was not a beautiful institution. It gave her all the problems that she had not come across so far. For her, marriage was the epicentre of all her problems. She complained,

My problem started after my marriage. Sickness... I had never known about it before. It’s only after my marriage that all the problems started. Headache, fever... I had never come across before. I wasn’t sick when I was pregnant or during delivery. It was after the birth of my child. Two years after, my husband died. After sometime, I began to fall sick.

The pain was more when she met her former boyfriend again who was doing well in life. He was healthy and active. She felt even more burdened. She said,

When I met him at Churachandpur, I found out that he was the village chief. He looked healthy and prosperous. He inquired about me. He even offered to take me as his second wife if I agreed. But I couldn’t, I am sick, infected with HIV. I felt pity for myself that time.

Family problems such as poverty, differences with in-laws, husband’s infidelity were big issues but not as big or irreparable as HIV/AIDS. So, when they looked back and pondered on their marriage
and their present situation, they agreed that marriage was indeed a big mistake. A Muslim widow who shared a very good relationship with her husband even said that, had she not been married to him, she would never have suffered like this.

They knew that HIV/AIDS was their reality and it indeed was difficult to live with it. Another Muslim woman who had a love marriage after a romantic courtship of four years even regretted marrying her husband. She felt that:

Life would have been so different if I hadn’t married him. By marrying him, I’m infected and on top of that, they were pouring all the blame to me that I infected him. If I hadn’t married him, I’d have been at my parent’s house, doing things at my own will. They’d have loved me more. But instead...

A Meitei woman of 37 years sighed and said,

Marriage has changed things completely. There’s no more beauty in life.

HIV/AIDS indeed strips off romance and sweetness out of marriage. A Meitei woman who had rejected all her previous boyfriends for her husband had a difficult time digesting the reality of being detected as HIV positive. Marriage was good so long as her husband was behaving properly. When her son was hospitalized, the whole family was advised to go for a test. She narrated that phase of her life:

When we all were detected HIV positive, I forgot all those romances. When the tension was high, there were fights and quarrels only. There was financial problem also. It’s my entire fault. I didn’t try to find out anything about him. I did not ask anybody also. I was very foolish
then. I regret about it, AIDS is what I get for marrying him.

While most of the women trademarked marriage as a blunder or the thing that spoilt their lives, there were still some women who found silver lining in the cloud called marriage. While they hated being HIV positive or suffering from AIDS, they could console themselves and hold on to the positive side of their union. True, they got infected from their husbands, but still then marriage was a beautiful institution.

This is better explained through their experiences and narrations in the following theme.

3.2.2. Still a Sweet Experience

I feel that I would have been normal like other women if I had not married him. But I think God had forced me into marrying him and had given me this burden. But then, since I really loved him, I take AIDS as his gift of love.

— said a 34-year-old Muslim woman. Her husband passed away leaving her with two sons to look after. Inspite of facing lots of problems like financial crunch, emotional and physical burdens; those memories of their togetherness was enough to forgive her husband. She found strength in her husband’s love because it had divine intervention. As she had said that it was God who made her marry him, it was God who made her love him. And thus, the consolation. Another woman, a Rongmei woman also shared her experience:

I didn’t love him when I eloped with him. It was too late to come back home that I ran away with him.
Though he was involved in drugs and even infected me with HIV, he is a good person. He cares for me and the baby. If not for his past records of drug addiction, he is the best I can ask for. Even if I am given a second chance I will still choose him.

Those women whose husband had treated them well and loved them were more positive in their outlook towards their marriage. Inspite of the burden they were given, they could somehow bear it. One woman even went to the extent of accepting AIDS as a gift of love from her husband. The love of their husbands that they got or are experiencing at present was strong enough to blur their sufferings and blunder. These women had had their share of marriage. The marriage was sour for most of them and sweet for some of them. Since most of them were young widows, one could not help but raise the question of remarriage. And this is dealt within the following segment.

3.2.3. Re-marriage

Of all the women under study, 76 percent of them were widows. After their husband's death, they went through various emotional turmoil and physical desires. When they were inquired about their opinion on remarriage, they shared their experiences. There were those women who did not even pause to think of marrying again. A 29-year-old Rongmei woman who had a terrible experience on marriage shared her opinion,

I suffered so much torture at the hand of my husband. He beat me up and always spent his time drinking. His death was the biggest relief I could ask for. Why should I fall into this terrible pit of marriage again?
I've had enough. I don't want to marry again. Besides that, I am HIV positive. My two children are with me. This is enough for me.

After suffering much at the hands of her husband, this woman could not have faith in marriage again. She did not want to break away from the relief. For her, marriage was a pit, a terrible pit. And even if she thought that she would change her mind, she was reminded of her HIV status and her children. These things prevented her from giving herself another chance in marriage.

I've never felt attracted to anybody after my husband's death. I thank God for that. I don't want to marry again.

She had a beautiful relationship with her husband. And unlike the previous case, they did not have a bad taste about marriage.

A Tangkhul woman of 42 years had a different reason, she said,

When my husband passed away, I was too unwell to think about re-marriage. I was going through emotional and spiritual battle. I was suffering physically. That's why this thought of remarriage didn't occur. Who would want to marry this skinny, ugly being? (laughs aloud). I am too unwell to think of that.

For woman like her, ill-health prevented her from seeking for another emotional tie. Her sufferings - physical, emotional and spiritual blocked her from the other world beside her. She was conscious of her looks, her physical appearance and knew right away that nobody would want her anymore. She was so preoccupied with her illness that she could not think of anything else, let alone re-marriage. But there were
also some women like a 35-year-old Meitei widow who felt the need to go out, have fun and even thought of marrying again until she was stopped by a feeling of guilt, the guilt of being HIV positive. In her own words:

> After my husband’s death, I dated some men. But I began to think about my life, my HIV status. I realized that I should not be infecting HIV to others by marrying again. I felt very guilty about it. So, I stopped myself from all these emotions. As of now, I'm too weak for it.

If she were a normal widow, she would not have minded about giving herself a second chance despite having children as learnt from her narration that she even dated some persons after the death of her husband. But it was because she was HIV positive that she stopped herself. She was strong enough to control her emotions and save herself from the guilt of infecting others. Most of the women were young when they became widows. Their physical needs were strong and they needed emotional support. They could have taken the plunge if not for being HIV positive. A young Muslim divorcee sighed,

> Many good proposals came for me. I am still young. Oh, if only I were not HIV positive! Whenever I think of marrying again, I’m reminded of my disease.

She was young. And she felt that she was too young to live alone for the rest of her life. And how she had suffered and cried by herself many times when good proposals came along her way. She felt her youth wasted away in loneliness. But the realization of her HIV status prevented her from her second life. The expression, "Oh, if only I were
not HIV positive!" took away all the fun and desires from her. Another Muslim woman, a widow of 30 years suggested that if the marriage was between two HIV positive persons, then she could consider it.

While most of the widows shied away from marrying again, one Muslim woman went ahead with second marriage. Her husband died of AIDS leaving behind a daughter from their marriage. She came back to her parents' house after her husband's death. She knew about the nature of her husband's death but she did not care much about it. She was very healthy that time and felt nothing suspicious. Then she got married with someone younger than her.

After three years of their marriage, she was detected as HIV positive and she began to feel suspicious about her husband who was either suffering from diarrhoea or persistent fever very frequently. She saw that her husband's body was wasting away. She got him tested but he was found to be HIV negative. But still then she was doubtful and was planning for another test. She said,

I am filled with guilt whenever I see my husband. I am responsible for his condition. I should not have agreed to marry him. His family is unhappy with him for marrying someone older than him and also a widow. On top of that he is suffering because of me. If I could, I want to take full responsibility for his treatment. But I feel so helpless. I've spoilt someone's life.

Locking away all her doubts and rationality, she married but when reality faced her, she was full of guilty feelings, because she had
infected her husband. She was guilty because she had spoilt somebody’s life, made many people unhappy, specially her in-laws. The guilt was so strong that she wanted to compensate her husband for infecting him. The desire was strong but in reality, she was helpless. She was in a dilemma. That was the reason why many HIV positive women wanted to avoid second marriage.

They were very cautious about infecting others. So, they avoided marrying again. Those who did remarry were filled with guilt. Another woman, a Tangkhul who remarried after being divorced from her first husband was a confused person. She was not sure about who infected whom. This is better explained in her own narration.

When I was tested positive for HIV, I was feeling very guilty, thinking that I might have been infected my husband. I decided that I’d leave him if he was found to be HIV negative. Unfortunately, he was also found to be HIV positive. But at the same time, my husband’s first wife also died mysteriously. So, I’m confused about the way we became HIV positive. It may be from him to me or the other way round. But whatever it is, the reality is we both are infected.

Those two women who had remarried were living with guilt and doubt. There was doubt about the success of second marriage for other women. During this chaos, one Muslim woman offered the proposal that if the marriage was between two HIV positive persons, then she could think about it. During the discussion, it comes into notice that the Muslim women were more concerned about marrying again, while the women of other communities, specially the Rongmei and Kuki were less
interested. Almost all the women were found to be infected from their husbands. So, it becomes relevant to see their reaction when their husbands were detected as HIV positive.

3.3. Husband's Detection

However unaware they might have been, the women knew that HIV/AIDS was a dangerous thing and knew that if their husbands were infected, there was a great chance of them being infected. There were different responses on learning about their husband's status. These responses were analyzed and came together under these themes.

3.3.1. Shock

Her husband was yet to be buried when a 33-year-old Rongmei woman received the report of her husband's test for HIV. On reading the report of the result, she fainted. The shock was too much for her. She later fell into depression and took really a long time to recover herself.

The same condition was with a Muslim woman who found it difficult to digest the fact. She had never thought that her husband would become HIV positive. She had never expected her husband's illness to be AIDS. She shared,

When I was pregnant with our third child, may be in the fourth month, my husband began to fall ill, very ill. I became suspicious and started asking him. He got tested positive for HIV. I was shocked to learn about his status. I cried very much. I was really hurt.
When worst happens when least expected, emotions are difficult to control. Shock was an emotion which numbed those women. They had never thought that their husband could suffer from HIV related diseases. But shock cannot be taken as a community based emotion. It is very subjective. And it becomes interesting to see other forms of emotions as discussed in the following sections.

3.3.2. Anger

She was a pampered child at home. Her husband had married him after much drama and emotions. It was good until she came to know about her husband’s involvement in drugs. She expected much from their marriage. That was why a 35-year-old Muslim woman reacted violent when she learnt about her husband’s HIV status.

When his test result was brought home, my brother told me not to tell him yet as he was still weak. I was very angry with him. Because he had been advised not to take drugs again but he disobeyed everyone. So I was very angry. I hated him. I even wished him to die.

She even wished her husband to die. But in reality, she was not cursing him. The anger was poured out because of too much concern for her husband. She was angry because he disobeyed and continued with his drugs intake. She felt betrayed of her love and care. And when things turn out the opposite way from what was expected, the outburst was obvious. The same condition was gone through by another.

A Kuki woman of 33 years was very angry with her husband when she came to know about his HIV status. She had asked him to stop
his ways when she learnt about his drugs habit. Not even her, but the
doctor also advised him to stop taking drugs. She felt cheated of her
trust and felt betrayed. She spoke out,

    I was angry. Angry because he was advised not to
continue with what he was taking.

In another case of one Meitei woman, revelation of his HIV status
transformed the whole atmosphere of the house. There was anger, fights
and quarrels due to this. The situation is better captured in her own
words.

    I was very angry with him for infecting me and my
children. I always started quarrels with him regarding
this. I accused him that his bad nature was the cause of
our suffering. There was always tension in the house. I
hated to see him. And he also avoided me. He used to
stay away from home till late hours. There was fight and
quarrels only. The financial crunch added more burden
to my problem.

People mostly expect a lot from their marriage. So, it comes not
as surprise that this woman expected a lot from her husband and her
marriage. The confirmation of her husband's HIV status was an
irreparable damage which destroyed the whole family because the family
members were either infected or affected. She did not want to see him
because he reminded her of the harsh reality. While she could have the
luxury of expressing her emotions whatever form it may be, her husband
seemed to consider it better to avoid her and escape from guilt and
accusations. Due to more expenditure on medical care and other
subsidiaries, they suffered financially and this added more fuel to her anger.

As observed from the analysis, emoting of anger was more prevalent amongst Kuki, Meitei and Muslim women. But it was also found out from the conversation that the Rongmei woman was very angry with her husband for being HIV positive and not simply at the situation. The Tangkhul women were found to be more subdued in their emotions. They were more sad than angry.

3.3.3. Sadness

Some of the wives felt sad on learning about their husband’s HIV status. Some felt sad because they loved their husband while others were sad because they would be infected too.

One Meitei woman, whose marital relationship was on rocks, was sad on learning that her husband was HIV positive. She did not love her husband anymore as he was always torturing her. He came home drunk or was always high on drugs. He never brought home money but fights and shame instead. She was sad because she knew she was going to be infected too. She expressed her response on learning about her husband’s condition:

I was very sad. When I overheard people saying how the wives also became HIV positive, my temperature shot up and my head became bigger with anxiousness.
But situation was different with those women who shared a marital bliss with their husbands. Another Meitei woman whose husband started falling unwell when they were at the peak of their happiness was very sad. She said,

When I first came to know about his HIV condition, I was very sad, very sad. I didn’t feel that bad about my own detection.

The same feelings and emotions were shared by a Tangkhul woman whose husband was tested positive for HIV. These women came to know about their husband’s condition during their illness. Knowledge about the reality made them very sad and very weak at heart. One Muslim woman shared the pain that she went through. She narrated,

My husband was often very ill. He used to have fever every now and then and also suffered from diarrhoea time to time. When he was taken to a hospital, the doctor inquired about him and when his involvement in drugs was revealed, he was advised to go for a test. He was detected as HIV positive. He was suffering from AIDS.

I was terribly sad (chokes with emotions). Oh! It was AIDS.

So also a Rongmei woman was very sad on learning about her husband’s status.

3.3.4. Indifference

Most of the Kuki women showed indifference towards their husbands’ status. This was either due to their lack of awareness about
HIV/AIDS or their cool attitude. The experience of the first case was encountered in the narration of 45-year-old Kuki woman.

She recalled,

When the doctor told me about his HIV status, I was cool about it. It was because I was ignorant about it and I thought that it must be just another kind of disease. I thought there was nothing to be afraid of. It was only after his death that I began to panic.

Another woman of the same community was also cool about it when she learnt about her husband’s status. She said that her husband was an injection drug user. She found that he was going to Shalom (a Hospice) alone for treatment. She became suspicious. When she confronted him, he admitted that he was HIV positive. He told her not to tell anyone as there were not many people around there who were HIV positive. She was not so emotional about it and did not create any scene also.

3.3.5. Non-confirmation of Husband’s status

There was another section of women who never came to know about their husband’s HIV status while they were still alive. Those women found rather more difficult to deal with their discovery. They mostly showed anger. One such woman was 29-year-old Rongmei woman. She said,

Even on his dead bed, he didn’t tell me anything about his status. He died with his secret. He didn’t tell me that he was HIV positive. I was very angry with him.
Another woman, a Meitei widow, aged 36 years showed her anger and frustration to her in-laws for hiding the truth from her. She blamed them that if they had told her, she could have tried at least to prolong his life. She said that she was still angry with everyone for what they had done to her. Whenever she remembered her husband, she could not be at ease with herself.

Some women did never come to know about their husbands' condition because they did not want to know. For one Kuki woman, she said that the reality would be too unbearable. She knew all along what he was suffering from. She remembered,

My husband was hospitalized and the report of his test result was kept with my mother-in-law but I didn't read it. I was afraid to know the result. I didn't have the courage to face reality. But I knew that he was HIV positive.

A 34-year-old Muslim widow of an injecting drug user thought that it was not worthwhile to go for her husband's test report after his death. She said that her husband's status was never confirmed. While he was hospitalized, he was advised to get tested. But the result was never given. Whenever she went, they kept it postponed. By that time, her husband had already passed away. And besides that she was already advanced in her pregnancy and had decided not to go for the result after all.

Knowledge about their husbands' status showed variety of emotions and responses. The pain and hurt was difficult to bear and on
top of that, they had to bear the brunt of their husbands' illness and death. This is discussed in the following section.

3.4. Husband’s Illness and Death

Wives went through a lot of trials and tribulations during their husbands' illness. There were emotional battles as well as financial constraints they had to go through. Transformations in their thoughts and their living were also come across with their husbands' death. If there was sadness over the loss of a husband, there was fear of becoming a widow. On the other hand, some women heaved a sigh of relief on their husbands' death. There could be seen lots of emotional dramas and other responses under the present topic. Analysis of these responses was categorized under the following themes.

3.4.1. Sadness

When my husband was on his dying bed, I was very sad. I cried a lot. But I didn’t want him to see me like that. So I cried in secret.

It was not a wonder for a woman to feel sad and cry when her husband was on a dying bed. This was how one Kuki woman recalled that dark phase of her life. The atmosphere at home was gloomy and sad. The feeling of losing a loved one was very depressing. This feeling of sadness was found to be manifold. They felt sad to see their husband die.
A Kuki woman whose husband was hospitalized due to severe sinusitis found it difficult to go back to the memory lane because it was sad. But she narrated,

He was hospitalized for sinusitis. He had got it washed three times before. Then, they (the doctor) asked him to get a minor operation done. After the operation, he began to grow weak. He lost lots of blood. I knew that he was not going to survive. It was very sad to see him dying slowly. He was simply slipping away from us. During that time if I stayed at home, I became anxious and if I was at the hospital, I couldn't bear to see him. That's why I didn't enter his room. I sat outside his ward and cried.

And when he finally passed away, she could not bear the loss. She did not feel like eating food. They always used to eat from the same plate. There were many sweet memories of their togetherness and she found it hard to forget.

The same condition was encountered by one Muslim woman. Theirs was a love marriage. Her husband kept her well, and treated her with love. And when the cruel hand of death took him away she found it hard to forget.

When I learnt about his illness, I became very sad. I lost my appetite. The day he died... I didn't realize what was happening. I couldn't understand what was going on. It seemed as if I was floating.

She continued,

I was wondering how I'd live without him. Though he was not earning, having a husband made me feel secure. A widow is always looked down. I thought that if
I had to go back home, I was thinking what others would say about me. I was feeling so ashamed.

For some, sadness simply was due to loss of their dear ones. The emptiness that they felt and the void that their husbands' death had left was the reason for their sadness. In her case, her husband was like a protective shield which protected her from the outside world – the world beyond her marriage. Having a husband served at least one purpose, that of giving her a status in the society though she could get nothing else besides that. She was more concerned about her marital status than the loss of a loved one. For no fault of hers, she was forced to feel ashamed. Fear of widowhood was seen in the next case also.

A Meitei woman, a young widow of 30 years expressed the vulnerability of being a widow. Her husband died after a short illness. Since she could not bear the torture of her in-laws anymore, she went back to her parents’ house. She shared,

My husband’s death was least expected. While I was still mourning my loss, my in-laws added more worries. They really ill-treated me. So, I took my daughter and went back home. With his death, I had become a widow. Life of a widow is very critical. People can easily sneer me, scold me, gossip about me. People like us are very vulnerable. If I stay timid, people will take advantage and if I am aggressive, I'll be taken as a characterless person. I am pulled between these two.

When her husband died, a Tangkhul woman of 29 years was sad and she cried. She cried thinking about how to continue with her life as a widow. She cried, thinking of her daughter who was still very young. She
did not want to be labeled as a widow and that was what made her very sad.

Some women felt the loss of security, a breakdown of one's lifeline of family's economy. That was the reason why a 30-year-old Muslim woman felt very sad and burdened. Her husband was a truck driver and he earned well. He kept her well and happy. She did not earn but was a homemaker. When her husband began to fall ill and was dying, she became helpless and worried. She said,

The day he died... I was so sad. I didn’t know what to do with life. I was not earning and I had to look after my two sons. This thought made me very sad. I cried over my fate, my ill fate.

At most of the time, women are found crying for themselves. While some cried over their new status as widows, others cried over the insecure future economic condition. They were dependant on their husbands financially and loss of a bread-earner was a shock. It was unthinkable.

One Rongmei woman was so shocked that she could not accept her loss for many days. And for many months, she lived like a mad person. She had thrown all her being into their marriage that when her husband died, she felt that her world had crumbled down. She was sad and filled with self-pity. Though the reason or the nature of sadness may be different, women from all the communities felt the same emotions.
On the other side, some women were more angry than sad when their husbands were dying or when they died. They justified their anger through their narratives.

3.4.2. Anger

A Kuki woman was very angry with her husband for being HIV positive. Even his death could not slow down this emotion for him. She said,

I was filled with anger when he died. If he had to die so early, why did he ever marry me? That was what I felt that time. The children were also still very young and he simply passed away.

Her anger was found to be the modified form of sadness. She felt so helpless at being a widow and a mother of fatherless children that her sadness turned into anger. The anger was not out of hatred for her husband but out of a sudden change of her status and role.

But the case of two Rongmei women was different. They, who had suffered much at the hands of their husbands, were filled with anger. One of them said that her husband continued to torture her even in his dying bed. She said, "He slept in the noon and when night came, he asked me to massage him. If I happen to doze off, he used to kick me". She had to run here and there for the hospital bill and he did not show even a single gesture of gratitude.

When the wives were ill-treated by their husbands, their feelings were more of contempt and anger. The expressing of this emotion
depends on the way they had been treated. Since they were ill-treated, they found it hard not to keep records of the amount of money that they had spent for their husbands' treatment. Financial burden is one reality which is difficult to ignore. So, it came as no surprise when some women heaved relief when their husbands died.

There was another section of women who never came to know about their husband’s HIV status while they were still alive. Those women found rather more difficult to deal with their discovery. They mostly showed anger. One such woman was 29-year-old Rongmei woman. She said,

> Even on his dead bed, he didn't tell me anything about his status. He died with his secret. He didn't tell me that he was HIV positive. I was very angry with him.

Another woman, a Meitei widow, aged 36 years showed her anger and frustration to her in-laws for hiding the truth from her. She blamed them that if they had told her, she could have tried at least to prolong his life. She said that she was still angry with everyone for what they had done to her. Whenever she remembered her husband, she could not be at ease with herself.

Knowledge about their husbands' status showed variety of emotions and responses. The pain and hurt was difficult to bear and on top of that, they had to bear the brunt of their husbands' illness and death.
There were some women who responded relief. This is explained elaborately in the next theme.

3.4.3. Relief

Those women who had a very bad experience with their husbands were extraordinary in their attitude towards their husbands' death. Unlike the other cases, they found relief and liberation. One such was the case of a Rongmei woman who had suffered much. She was very young when she eloped with him. She was just 15 years old then. Situations forced her to grow faster than she was meant to. Her husband was a drunkard who only knew how to spend his time with booze and beat her. She had to earn for livelihood and also to look after the house. Not even a single day she spent without being beaten by her husband. When her husband was hospitalized, she just delivered a baby and this made her not capable to nurse him at the hospital.

According to her, it was God's plan that her husband did not get to be looked after by her. When he died, she said,

Women wail and weep when their husbands die but as for me, I didn't do that. There was nothing good about him or our relationship to feel emotional about. Deep down, I was more relieved than sad. I didn't mourn his death.

He had lived his life and gone and I'm left to look after my two children. I'm happy that he is dead. I hated him.

One Meitei woman whose husband was still alive wished for her husband to die simply because she had got tired of him. She expressed,
I wish (that) he'd die. I even told him to go somewhere and die.

When living with a husband was too difficult, she was ready to accept anything in exchange for that. Even widowhood seemed to be a good bargain. The relief was due to the going away of someone she hated. The hatred, the anger, and the relief... all these were in one way found to be the outcome of a sudden fear– the fear of being HIV positive. Since the husbands died of AIDS related diseases, there was fear shrouded around. The outburst of different emotions like shock, anger, sadness, etc. on confirmation of their husbands' HIV status was tinged with their fear of being infected with HIV by their husbands.

Knowledge of being infected of near and dear ones with HIV/AIDS is a hard reality to accept. But when this reality comes to self, many people responded in varied way. These responses and emotions are elaborated in the following topic.

3.5. Confirmation of Being HIV positive

Being confirmed of their HIV status usually involves three stages – going for the test, in between the test and the result and finally, the result of the test.

3.5.1. Going for the Test

For many women, the decision to get tested was a giant step. They knew that they were HIV positive. They only needed to get confirmed. Facing such a dilemma was a Kuki woman, a young widow
whose husband died of AIDS. Thinking about the possibility of being HIV positive made her restless and sweaty. She shared,

I suspected myself to be HIV positive. I was scared to go for the test. I knew that I’d be HIV positive. The only difference was that I hadn’t had the proof yet. I was constantly suffering from fever in the evening. I started feeling weak and I was unwell. Even when I came to office, I was never at rest. There was fever, headache and body ache. I felt that I really need to go for check-up. Yet, I didn’t go because of shame. And I was not bold enough to accept the result.

Here, one can see a variety of situations. First, she thought for herself. She did not want to hurt herself by confirming her fear of being HIV positive. She was deceiving herself. But however hard she tried, her body was giving her away, her physical health was no more giving her side. She felt the need to go for medical treatment but she stopped herself out of "shame". She felt shameful because of the society. She knew that the society would not be mild on her situation. She was afraid to be looked down upon; she was scared to be an odd-one-out. She did not have the courage to accept her destiny.

Similar is the case with this Tangkhul woman. After two years of her husband’s death, she was advised by a doctor to go for blood test. She gave the doctor, a straight blunt “no” for an answer. She told him that she did not want to know about her HIV status. She told him that she neither had the money nor the courage to know her status. She told the doctor that if she had known her status, the one month that she could have lived, she would live for only one week.
Getting tested would only confirm their status and status confirmation would disrupt their ‘normal’ life. Thus, they showed reluctance. This was what a Muslim woman went through.

I knew life would not be the same anymore once my status was confirmed. The food which I used to enjoy would taste different. I would not be able to sleep as before. That was the reason why I postponed one year for getting tested.

Ignoring the harsh reality was one way of consoling herself by denying the fact. She stole some time to ‘live’. The reality would not allow her to enjoy doing those things which she enjoyed before. But she could not run away for long and at last succumbed to the practicality of the situation and got herself tested.

Though taking such a step was a big decision, the outcome of the result, whatever it was, provided a certain stand. One Muslim woman shared,

I was very scared before I got tested. After I was tested and my result was confirmed, I came to a certain stand. I thought that it was my fate and I could not run away from it.

She was tested positive for HIV. But fortunately, her sons were normal, much to her relief. The fear and the doubts had all been settled now. Though her HIV status wounded her, the condition of her sons soothed her wound and gave her certain joy and hope.

Such confirmation provided them the need to decide what to do next instead of swinging in between doubts. For many HIV infected
individuals, the perceived possibility of infection intensified as they waited for test results. For most respondents, testing simply confirmed suspicions of infection and challenged notions of the self. Testing then is the initially encountered significant milestone in biological disruption for persons with HIV/AIDS.

3.5.2. In Between the Test and the Result

Universally, as individuals reflect on their time being tested for HIV antibodies, and awaiting confirmation for their suspicions, such times are recalled as “the most trying time” or “waiting for confirmation” or “the days I prayed the most”.

For one Muslim woman, 34 years of age, she was going through a trauma in between the test and the result. To quote her own words;

I wished over and over again that the test result would turn out to be negative. I thought that whatever the result might be, I would face it. But deep down, I kept telling myself that I’d not be HIV positive. I didn’t even want to think myself that I could be HIV positive though I knew that I’d be. I kept telling myself that the result would turn out to be negative.

They denied themselves of the possibility of being infected. They deceived themselves because the reality was harsh, and they found it hard to accept. A Kuki woman was fighting a fierce battle in her mind. She was very anxious. She thought that the result would not be positive. She protested that it should not be. So, some women prayed, putting their burdens to the divine power. Such is the case of one 42-year-old
Tangkhul woman. She was a widow and she had four children. She could not put herself in the situation of an HIV positive person because she had too many responsibilities and she was afraid at the same time. She said,

In between the test and the result, I was very worried, anxious ... thinking of what the result would be, I could neither eat nor drink. I was very worried. All I thought was, "Lord, give me the strength to bear it". I was praying every moment.

While some prayed to God to give them courage to accept the outcome of the result and the strength to carry on their lives, others prayed for miracles, like the case of a Rongmei woman whose husband was suffering from AIDS. She knew that she would be tested HIV positive but still then, she prayed, hoping against hope. She recalled,

I was anxious very restless. I prayed for the result to be negative. Even if my husband was HIV positive, I wanted to be clean free from HIV.

She had a feeling of selfishness. She wanted herself to be normal and clean even though her husband was infected. Hanging between the two worlds of 'maybe' or 'maybe not' gave them worries and made them anxious. It took away their peace of mind and also their appetite. And in return, it gave them sleepless nights. A Meitei woman, a mother of two remembered those days as this,

The time between the test and the result was the most trying time. My mind was always kept occupied about the result of the test. I kept praying to God that it'd turn out to be negative. There were times when I'd wake up suddenly from my sleep.
Those trying times made a person long for miracles, even though they knew all the while that it was an impossible dream. Some of them suggested that testing positive for antibodies or receiving a conforming AIDS diagnosis brought a sense of relief from worry about whether they were infected.

3.5.3. The Confirmation

There were various ways in which they responded to their results. While few of them took it coolly, most of the women broke down. ‘I was heartbroken’, ‘I cried’, ‘I was shocked’ were some of the common ones.

Those women who least expected themselves to be HIV positive were the ones who were shocked on knowing their status. This 33-year-old Rongmei woman came back to stay at her parents’ house after the death of her husband and her only child. She felt normal and healthy. She started a business and for that she had to travel a lot. It was about a year or so that she felt weak and suffered from herpes. She consulted a doctor who advised her to go for a test. Maybe due to lack of awareness or because of faith in her moral integrity, she was cool about the test. But she got the shock of her life when the result was revealed. She recalled,

'When I got the result, I was shocked; I could not hear what the counselor was trying to tell me. I cried so bitterly. I didn’t want to return home. I couldn’t. I asked the rickshaw puller to ride from one place to another. It
was almost the whole day because when I finally came back home, it was already dusk.

When the shock was too much, it took away one's normal sense of living, like the case of a 35-year-old Meitei woman. She found it hard to digest the truths. She shared,

The day I got the result... my mind became blank. I got numb. It was the limit. Later, I cried so much I had stopped taking food. I didn't even comb my hair. I was just sitting aloof, depressed. I didn't talk to anybody also.

A Muslim woman, a divorcee also experienced a shock on being recalled about her condition. She got divorced from her husband because she heard people talking that wives and children of drug addicts got infected with HIV. She had never expected to be infected though. She said, "I was shocked. I didn't know how to react". She lost her appetite, sleep and became very frail and weak due to that.

While some were shocked, some were cool about their result. This attitude was mostly found among the women of Kuki group. One of them said,

When I got the result, I was not terrified. Even if I was terrified, how would that help? (Laughs). Some panicked on being revealed as HIV positive. But I was cool. I could not cure myself by being sad or by crying. I thought that by taking care of myself and eating properly, I'd be alright.

Another Kuki woman also testified how she was so indifferent about the result. She said, "The counselor at the World Vision was
reluctant to give the result if I was not broad-minded. I was very cool and she was the one who was tensed". She told the counselor, "I'm going to die. If not from this disease, then I might die from the other. I'm not somebody who will die of worries". Then the result was finally given to her. She was tested positive for HIV.

Husband's love and care worked wonders. It took away all the bitterness and worries from his wife. This was seen in the experience of this blind Kuki widow. When she regained her sense from the coma after six months, she found that she was blind and HIV positive. But still then, she said, "I never felt angry with my husband for infecting me. What's the use? Since he was so good to me, I felt okay. I was not sad or worried. He really treated me well".

Husband's attitude shaped a lot in the mentality of the wife. Like the case of this Melitei woman. This was what she came across on the day she got her status confirmed. She loathed,

I was really heartbroken when I came to know that I was HIV positive. I cried so much in the hospital that I couldn't even get up to walk away. Everyone came and consoled me. I didn't have the courage to go back.

Her husband's family was not a loving one. They were only waiting for an excuse to scold her or talk about her. So, with this revelation of her HIV status, she had another battle to fight. She did not have the heart to face her home, her relatives, and the world. And the
worst that could happen to her was her husband’s attitude. How she cried over her fate!

The worst part was my husband’s reaction. He didn’t show any sympathy or guilt on his part. These drug addicts... they lack emotions.

Most of the emotions they went through were sadness, worries and anger. A 36-year-old Meitei woman recalled,

That day, I couldn’t stay still. I felt as if my small, lean body had become this much big (demonstrates with her hands and laughs). I couldn’t lift up my head. I felt as if I was carrying a big rock on my head. I cried so much. I cried till I could cry no more.

She added philosophically,

In one way, our tear is good. There’s limit, an end to it.

“Being detected as HIV positive was the worst that could happen to a person”, said a Rongmei woman who got infected from her husband. She cried so much when her condition was revealed. She remembered that there was nothing that could console her that time.

A Kuki woman of 45 years recalled how she reacted that day, the day she could never forget.

When my result was given as HIV positive, I was heartbroken (cries on recollection of the experience). I was totally shattered. Even now I’m only waiting for my death. I think that I’m going mad.

This woman happened to be one whose husband forcibly married her and when she grew old, her husband married another woman. She
was driven away from home and the worse that could happen to her was being infected with HIV by her husband. She had no one to turn to and she felt too ashamed to go back to her parental home also. Her parents were no more and she did not want to be a burden to her siblings. She stayed alone in a rented house and stayed hungry most of the time because she could not earn much due to her deteriorating health and her relatives seldom come to visit her. No wonder, she longed for death. There was no one to lean on, no refuge to run to.

Sense of worthlessness, loss of zeal for living were also come across by some. For this 42-year-old Rongmei woman, HIV/AIDS was something which she dreaded very much. She thought that such a thing could not happen to her because she was very pious morally on her part. But when it did happen, she was shattered;

When I came to know about my HIV status, I didn't want to live in this world anymore (laughs). I cried in front of the doctor and also before the nurses who gave me the counseling. I kept telling that I didn't have any sexual relation with anybody besides my husband. And later when I learnt that I got infected from my husband who got infected from other immoral women, I even wanted to kill my husband.

She expected the same thing in return for what she had given. If she had been faithful with her husband, she expected faithfulness from her husband too. And when that did not happen, she was shattered. She was even overcome with the feeling of killing her husband.
Like her, some women were more angry than sad. When they came to know about their status, and also learnt that they got infected from their husbands, they fumed with anger. For this young Rongmei widow, the confirmation of her status reminded her of her dead husband. Actually it was her hatred for him that she recalled. She had always hated him from before but this confirmation made her hate him even more. She blamed him for whatever she was at present.

While some were angry with their husbands, some loathed themselves too for getting into a relationship with them. A 33-year-old Muslim woman justified her anger in this manner.

I was angry with my first husband and even with myself for being so stupid. He was around 32 - 33 years of age when he married me. I was very young then. He knew the kind of person that he was HIV positive. Knowing that, he should have controlled himself.

Putting all the blame to her husband, she took shelter from any fault by considering herself young and too innocent that time. She accused her husband for what she was today.

After I knew the result, I could not sleep for one week. I thought that my life was in vain, useless. All my life I had never used any intoxicants. I had always been dutiful towards God, my husband, my children. I was complaining, "Why do I have to see this life?"

She added,

Oh! That day! I didn't know what to do. I was so angry (laughs at the recollection). I was very angry. But
what could I do? The virus was already in my blood. There was nothing I could do. There was no help.

She was perfect in her duty towards God and her family. And when she became infected with HIV, all her efforts, her devotion towards God seemed to crush. She had never thought that she would be fated with such thing as HIV. She felt that she had been cheated of her faith and duty. Thus, she justified herself of her anger towards God.

But the confirmation of their status gave them a certain stand. After a storm of doubts which tossed between the two possibilities, there came the sudden calmness. They had stopped living in the false hope of not being HIV positive. Then, there came the realization and the acceptance that it was now their life and they had to live with it. The past is gone and they could do nothing to bring about a change. They loathed, or cursed or still kept it as something sweet and precious. Those days have slipped away from their hands. What they had now was their present. The following chapter studies the women with AIDS as their present, their reality. The experiences that they were going through were studied from their responses and thus the meanings were grasped.