CHAPTER-1

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Social Work and Family

The purpose of social work as a social science is to assist people in need. It tries to diagnose the cause of individual and group disorganization and provides services through suitable programmes to set right. G.R. Madan (1982) has devoted a full volume to the study of social disorganization.

Social work views the family as a system of social disorganization. According to Madan (1982), family disorganization may be thought to include any sort of non-harmonious functioning within the family. Thus, it may include not only the tensions between husband and wife but those arising between children and parents as well. Tension between parents and children often present serious problems of adjustment if they are not to result in permanent friction and such disagreements may also result in tensions between husband and wife.

Social work and family are intimately related to each other. It deals with issues of desertion, divorce and widowhood. Thus social work plays a significant role in tackling the problems of family.

Family is the first and foremost institution of society. As an institution, family has played a significant role in socializing and integrating the young into the value system of the society. It caters to the needs and desires of all its members. Every individual is born and brought up in a family; grows old in the family and eventually dies in the family. In this connection, MacIver and Page (1949) have said: “Of all the organizations, large and small, which the society unfolds, none transcends the family in the intensity of its sociological significance. It influences the whole society in innumerable ways, and its changes reverberate through the whole
structure. It is capable of endless variation and yet reveals a remarkable continuity and persistence through change”.

According to Goode (1965), the family is the fundamental instrumental foundation of the larger social structure on whose contribution all other institutions depend. He points out that it is the only institution, other than religion, which is formally developed in all societies. Family duties are the direct responsibility of everyone in the society with rare exceptions. Almost no family role or responsibility can be delegated to others, as more specialized obligations can be in a work situation. However, studies conducted on the changing character of the family have shown that despite several specialized and formal organizations taking away its functions, the family, especially in India, has remained the basic institution for the care of children.

**The Dysfunctions of the Family**

Notwithstanding its functional role in the family, it has its own weakness and shortcomings. If the home is warm, loving and secure, the children who grow up in such an environment pass on these benefits to persons in their own social environment. But if there is violence, terror and insecurity, then the home becomes a breeding ground for dangerous and destructive tendencies. Goode explains that the lessons children learn in the home about force and violence are not lost to them but are “extended to other social roles as well” (1971:634). Children born and raised in a violent home learn modes of adult behaviour as well as child behaviour from their role models (Owens and Straus, 1975).

**The Changing Family**

Traditionally, the relationships in the joint family were structured in the form of institutions, customs and practices. Individuals interacted with each other as role-players with little freedom and liberty. The children,
sons and daughters, wives and daughters-in-law, never questioned the power and authority of the parents, parents-in-law, husband and brothers.

Any deviations from the accepted norms and violation of authority were met with severe social, psychological and religious punishment by the society. Customs and traditions acted as the chief regulators of social life. Individuals, men and women, were graded into a rigid structure of superiority and inferiority relations. Youngsters and women had no right to question the power, authority and superiority of the elders. Thus, the family was hierarchically arranged.

**The British and Family Change**

With the advent of the British, significant changes occurred in India. The British were the first to introduce formal education through schools and colleges for both men and women. The introduction of industrialization released a large number of skilled and unskilled non-agricultural jobs for both men and women. The British also brought about social legislation to protect women against traditional customs and practices which treated them as inferior beings.

In short, with urbanization, industrialization, spread of education, legal reforms and economic changes, the society in India has been undergoing rapid transformation. The family patterns are changing fast and so are envisaged the roles of various family members.

**Family: Changes in the Inter-relationship of Members**

Family in modern society is relatively becoming non-institutional in the sense children, youngsters, women are demanding more freedom, liberty and equality, but corresponding changes in the values, attitudes and practices of the older generations who continue to be authoritarian and domineering are not taking place.
The relationships between men and women in general and husband and wife in particular started to become more subtle, liberal and equalitarian. The functions, role expectations, and values have changed to a great extent. As Nye and Hoffman (1963) have stated, their (women) values have become more equalitarian in nature and they no longer wish to be a decorative piece to be caged and confined within the four walls of their houses.

Memoria (1960) spoke about family disorganization which is caused due to social changes, conflicting roles, dissatisfying value systems and tensions. He was concerned about the disturbed family functions.

**The Family in Transition**

The joint family has been the basic and predominant form of family system in India since ancient times. It is based on intimacy, mutuality of interests, strong primary group control and mutual assistance in times of need. In it family traditions and pride are strong and individual members are dominated by the opinions of the larger group.

A distinctive feature of the joint family was that elders and men dominated the family by their power and authority. Youngsters and women had subordinate roles and status. They were expected to obey their (elders) orders and instructions without questioning them. Elders made decisions about the family and the individuals’ life issues. For example, it was the parents who decided the marriage, education and employment of the members. Youngsters and women had little liberty, equality and freedom of their own. All decisions regarding issues pertaining to family welfare were made by the elders.

According to Kapadia (1958: 246), family tradition was valued above everything, else, and the primary duty of the head of the family was to ensure that family traditions in all matters relating to life were
perpetuated by their solemn observance, however unmeaningful they might begin to appear as conditions changed. The traditional authority of the head over the junior members of the family was so awe-inspiring that the juniors never thought of expressing their difference, whatever their convictions might be. The subordination and super-ordination designed to regulate the lives of the different members in the hierarchy of the joint household, recognition of the family as a unit for all social relationships, the place assigned to the family as a juridical unit in family quarrels tended to give the family such enormous influence that the individual lost his/ her identity in it. The social environment never provided any opportunity to the individual to feel that he had interests apart from the family.

The British and the Family

With the advent of the British, a transformation of the cultural pattern became inevitable by virtue of the new economic organization, ideology and administrative system the British brought with them. Capitalism in the economic field, liberalism in the ideological domain, and the principle of equality in the social and political systems became the order of the day. Liberalism attacked all privileges and disabilities based on birth, hence the contract freely entered into by the individual became the juridical foundation of the new society. For it is in its challenge of authority that this democratic sentiment of liberalism finds expression. The individual is expected to accept a principle not because authority accepted it, but because its inherent validity secures for it the free consent of others. Rationalism is the second principle of liberalism. Institutions and traditions are valid only when they are acceptable to reason. The essence of the new philosophy was thus the emancipation of women. Respect for the individual became the slogan of the new era which catered for personal opinion, personal initiative and personal assertion. This philosophy gave rise to a concept of rights, and the struggle for these rights – rights of personal liberty, social liberty, economic liberty, domestic liberty and political liberty – has been the most
outstanding feature of world history from the late eighteenth century onwards. Thus, with the advent of the British, the family organization of the Hindus started undergoing profound modifications.

**Legislation and Family during British**

With the advent of Independence, the pace of change in the role, and status of women in India was greatly accelerated. By virtue of various Acts and Statutes – the Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929; the Hindu Gains of Learning Act, 1930; the Hindu Succession Act, 1953; Special Marriage Act, 1954; Hindu Marriage Act, 1955; the Suppression of Immoral Traffic in Women and Girls Act, 1958; Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961; and the Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act, 1956 – which forbade discrimination among citizens on the ground of sex, women can claim all the rights and privileges of a man. Urban women have entered higher education, and are holding official position in various types of salaried jobs and occupations. The Administrative & Foreign Services of India have also been opened to women. They have been elected to the Lok Sabha and the percentage of women MPs to both the Houses is decided higher than that the other countries like UK, the USA and Japan.

1.1 **Objectives of the Study**

The chief objective of the thesis was to study woman desertion as a consequence of family disorganization. The specific objectives were:

1. To know the socioeconomic background of the respondents, their spouses and both together,
2. To know whether there is any relationship between family disorganization and woman desertion,
3. To know whether there is any relationship between the respondents’ socioeconomic background and woman desertion,
4. To know whether there is any relationship between the respondents’ socioeconomic background and woman desertion in the context of family disorganization,
5. To know whether there is any relationship between the respondents’ marital background and woman desertion in the context of family disorganization.

6. To study the consequences of woman desertion in terms of reasons such as remaining unmarried, maintenance of self and children, and

7. To suggest an intervention strategy to contain the problem of woman desertion.

1.2 Hypotheses of the Study

The chief hypothesis is that there is a close relationship between family disorganization and woman desertion. The higher the level of family disorganization, the higher the level of woman desertion.

The specific hypotheses were:

1. There is a positive relationship between the respondents’ socio-economic background and woman desertion,

2. There is a positive relationship between the respondents’ marital background and woman desertion,

3. The higher the socioeconomic background, the higher the rate of woman desertion when the effect of family disorganization is controlled.

4. The higher the marital background, the higher the rate of woman desertion when the effect of family disorganization is controlled.

1.3 Review of Literature

Studies on marital separation have focused mainly on the incidence of divorce (Fonseca, 1966; Choudhary, 1988; Mehta, 1975). But desertion, another form of marital separation, is seldom studied as a subject of research1. The reason for undertaking research on divorce is that the

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1 Although desertion accounts for one of most serious types of broken families, surprisingly little research has been undertaken concerning the major consequences of this kind of marital disruption and the various role adjustments, it requires on the part of the families involved. Although such consequences and adjustments are in ways similar to those involved in divorce, in other ways they
incidence is legally recorded. On the other hand, desertion is not registered either in a police station or in a Court of Law. Their socioeconomic and marital problems are entirely different from those of the divorcees. In principle, the deserted women are married. They want to retain the status of a married woman, and do not have the intention of remarriage. Such women do not, however, enjoy the bliss of a married life.

Studies on Divorce

Indian Studies

Y.B.Damle (1957) made a study of 353 divorce cases from rural and urban areas. Damle came to the conclusion that childlessness of the wife was one of the important causes of divorce. Fonseca (1966) studied 1261 divorced couples. The study mainly focused on the socioeconomic, demographic factors and childlessness, as the causes of divorce.

Rama Mehta (1975) undertook a full scale study of divorces in Indian society. The main theoretical background used in the study was:

1. Indian society was going through dramatic and rapid changes affecting the traditional roles of women radically, and,
2. Modern society, which is relatively secular, liberal, egalitarian, individualistic and is more tolerant and more open towards women who are desertees/divorcees.

The aim of the study was to assess the impact of changing values of the family. Mehta’s assumption was that modernization in terms of education, employment, income, legal rights, exposure to mass media and public life have made women more independent minded than men. Mehta contended that educated women from the middle and lower middle classes cannot make adjustment with the traditional family background of the

husband. According to Mehta, divorce is the result of maladjustment of modern women with the traditional family background of the husband.

According to Usha Devi (1998), the traditional structure of society is no longer supported by men and women who believe in traditional values. The changes in the status of women, both legal and social, have made an enormous impact on their psychology. Moreover, girls are brought up today in a more liberal, less rigid way which confirms less to the traditional feminine etiquettes. Mehta supports the view. “The old values are being eroded, women are earning and society as a whole is becoming more liberal’ (1975: 7).

A relatively recent full scale study of divorce comes from S.Pothen (1985). The objectives of the study were two-fold:

1. To know the marital adjustment and life of the people before divorce, and
2. To know the major causes and consequences of divorce on the socioeconomic status and life of the spouses and on their children and finally, to study the patterns of remarriage of the divorcees.

J.N. Choudhary (1988) conducted a study on *Divorce in Indian Society*. The study was concerned with investigating the structural dimensions of marital disruption. The specific objectives were:

1. To find out what type of persons go in for divorce i.e., to examine the socioeconomic and cultural background of the divorcees,
2. To find out with what variables is divorce-decision most related, particularly the association between marriage disruption and age at marriage, child-birth, income and level of education,
3. To assess the legal and social barriers in divorce,
4. To identify factors that affect adjustment after divorce, and
5. To study the process of role adjustment after divorce.
Phanka (1960), Narain (1962), Kochar (1965) and Mahajan (1966), in their studies on marital adjustments, have tried to correlate the problem of divorce with problems of marital adjustment and that of marital conflict.

It is important to know that desertion has not been studied as a consequence of family disorganization. Fonseca (1963) in his article *Family Disorganization and Divorce in Indian Communities* tried to shed light on the basic background elements, which constitute the disorganized units as seen from the records and proceedings in Court. In another article viz., *Marital Separations – Disorganization as seen through an Agency*, Fonseca (1964) tried to explain how family disorganization tends to produce women desertion.

Dhagamwar (1989) studied 65 unhappy married Hindu women who had filed for divorce, judicial separation or a decree of nullity of marriage. This study revealed that in about fifty per cent of the cases, the main cause of dispute was wife beating by a drunken husband. Two other factors mentioned are the sexual demands of the father-in-law and the sadistic teasing of the daughter-in-law by her mother-in-law and sister-in-law. The author found that although these women came from widely varying educational, social and economic background, they were characterized by helplessness, lack of confidence and total dependency on others when it came to making important decisions concerning their personal lives (P. 15).

**Studies on Marital Adjustment**

Terman (1938) has studied the psychological factors in marital happiness. Nye Ivan (1973) has studied the family, its structure and interaction. Memoria (1960) discussed the phenomenon of family disorganization in which he explained the part played by desertion. According to Memoria (1960), the social consequences of desertion are very unhealthy. Families may be permanently dissolved emotionally, the
wife and children often suffer much more severely than the husband, for desertion entails a humiliating rejection of the spouses.

Venkatrayappa (1972) studied households in two slums in Mysore City. Family life and marriage, parent child relationship were some of the variables studied along with socioeconomic and health conditions. He made certain specific observations that family life is affected because of low economic standards. A few families showed instability and quarrel followed by desertion by either of the spouse is common.

A Significant Study was undertaken by Vidya Srinivasan (1987) on “Deserted Wives in the Slums of Madras City”.

The objectives of the study were:

1. To describe the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of deserted wives in the slums of Madras city.

2. To identify certain relevant features of their marital and abandonment history. Relevant features of marital history included whether the marriage was a “Love marriage” or a traditional “arranged marriage”, whether they were happily or unhappily married in the first five years, and the number of years they had been married prior to abandonment. Abandonment history covered details regarding the status of the abandoned women before and after abandonment and the kinds of problems faced.

3. To ascertain how these women were coping with their abandoned status. Coping referred to the way the respondents were dealing with the situation as of date i.e., the type of job undertaken, monthly income, children’s education and type of shelter.

The respondents for the study were married women of any age, living, in a slum, who were deserted by their husbands. The findings revealed that the main cause of desertion was the husband’s ill-treatment.
Seema Kulkarni & Sneha Bhat (2010) wrote an article on “Issues and Concerns of Deserted Women”. The paper has presented data from two studies conducted in Sangli and Daund in Maharashtra. For the purpose of the study, the investigators chose to focus on women who throughout the marital relationship largely lived in violent circumstances. The broad findings are that woman desertion is to be found more among SCs/STs and Muslims. According to the study, the reasons for desertion would include inability to produce a male child, infertility, inadequate dowry from the woman’s natal home or simply the inability to fulfill the role of a Sati-Savitri or the normative woman. The studies on which the paper is based are simple in nature. The objectives and methodologies are not clear. Nevertheless, the studies have made a significant contribution to the study of woman desertion.

Singh (2004), in his book Deserted and Divorced Women in Contemporary Society, has dealt with the different problems of deserted and divorced women.

The basic objective of this study was to make a thorough empirical probe into the present status of the desertees, viz., by means of an appraisal of living conditions, problems and status of deserted and divorced Hindu women in contemporary society. The specific objectives, however, were the following:

1. To inquire into the real cause of desertion and divorce,
2. To ascertain and highlight the socioeconomic and psychological conditions in which the deserted and divorced women live as also the problems and difficulties they and their children faced or have felt in the course of post-separation familial living.

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2 A wife loyal to her husband regardless of his behaviour and character.
3. To focus upon the nature and types of exploitation, disabilities and humiliations which these women and their offspring are subjected to or face.

4. To make a probe into the separated women’s perception about their own and their children’s status in family and society, and,

5. To present an account of their role pattern as well as their attitudes, aspiration and modes of action relating to their family and social living.

The study was conducted with a sample of 132 maritally separated (100 deserted and 32 divorced) Hindu women. Data were collected through personal interview.

The main finding is that women were deserted and divorced due to marital discord and violence at the hands of their husbands.

Family Disorganization: A Social Work Perspective

Family disorganization does not occur in isolation. It reflects the larger social disorganization. Let us first understand the two concepts viz., social organization and social disorganization.

1. Social Organization

In simple terms social organization is made up of two words: social and organization whereas ‘social’ refers to human beings living together as a group in a situation requiring that they have dealings with one another, organization means a set of differentiated activities serving a common purpose and so correlated that the effectiveness of each is increased by its relation to the rest. Here a set of differentiated activities means the different groups and institutions which may contribute to the welfare or common purpose of the organization.
Meaning of Social Organization

The term “social organization” refers to a state of being, a condition in which the various institutions in a society are functioning in accordance with their recognized or implied purposes (Elliott and Merrill, 1950). In other words, social organization implies a relative harmony between individual attitudes and social values.

What are the characteristics of Social Organization?

Concept of Social Disorganization

So far we have discussed the concept of social organization. Let us understand the meaning of social disorganization.

The term ‘social disorganization’ is a relative concept. There is nothing like perfect social organization. Social organization implies a certain degree of social disorganization. As there may be various degrees of social organization, so is the case with social disorganization. Social disorganization may thus be more or less, when the forces of social change create a threat to social stability and as a result of which there arise social problems.

Social disorganization implies some breakdown in the social organization, which may be more or less according to the forces of social change operating at a particular time. In the words of Elliott and Merill (1940), “social disorganization” represents a breakdown in the equilibrium of forces, a decay in the social structure, so that old habits and forms of social control no longer function effectively’. Mowrer (1943) defines social disorganization as “whereas social organization consists of individual responses as a consequence of the operation of conventionalized patterns of consensus and control, any change in the cultural context, which impedes or destroys the functioning of the patterns of coordination which constitute the social order represents social disorganization. Gillin and Gillin (1951)
points out “social disorganization means such serious maladjustment between the various elements in the total cultural configuration as to endanger the survival of the group, or as to endanger the survival of the group or as seriously to interfere with the satisfaction of the fundamental desires of its members, with the result that social cohesion is destroyed.

**Family Disorganization and Woman Desertion**

Family is the most intimate social group. The unity of any group is a function of the similarity of values and attitudes among the various members of the family. Thus, complete family organization depends upon the unity of interacting personalities who are held together by certain psychological factors in a normal family. When these factors are present, the family may be said to be an organized unity and when they are not, the family becomes disorganized. The individual members in a family must knit up loose webs of their life organization under new and different circumstances. This is particularly so in the case of husband and wife, who have been recently brought together. According to Elliott and Merrill (1940), the family organization is characterized by the following three factors, each of which is present to some degree in the normal and unified primary group.

1. **Unity of Objectives**

The organized family possesses a unity of objectives. That is, its members possess similar attitudes on the most important aspects of their joint activities, such as the care and discipline of the children, their education, the allocation of various functions of the home, the question of sex relations, and other matters of a deeply personal nature.

2. **Unity of Personal Ambitions**

Complete harmony of personal ambitions with the welfare of the family may be difficult in a democratic society because of different life organizations and different personalities, yet in a well-organized family the
individual members must subordinate their interests to the welfare of the family as a whole. For instance, a father, who does not give up his expensive living in order to feed and clothe his family adequately, is failing in a basic function.

3. Unity of Interests

Unity of interests in almost all respects is mostly possible in an agricultural joint family, wherein matters of religious practices, education, recreation and economic activities the various members participated as a unit. Such an identification is difficult in modern urban life, where members of the family develop different interests by virtue of their roles in various secondary groups. However, a similarity of such interests i.e., religious, recreational, educational, and economic is more favourable to organized family as reciprocal relationships of family life operate more smoothly in such circumstances.

All families are subject to infinite gradations in these criteria of family unity. Perfectly organized families are rare, as is the case with completely disorganized families. A majority of the families who struggle through their relationships are often marred by bickering or tensions but they still continue to function on a fairly acceptable plane. For some, however, the tensions becomes so great that the individuals cannot continue their relationship. These tensions may be gradual developments, growing out of cultural dissimilarities or disparities in age, religious differences, economic difficulties or differences over fundamental values. The cumulative and precipitate crisis which disturbs the individual may also bring about disorganization of the family group. This may take the form of persistent domestic discord which may render harmonious relationship difficult although there may never be an open break in the formal unity of the family, or the tensions may take the extreme form is then complete both sociologically and legally. Mowrer (1943) calls the first stage as the disintegration of the family and second as the disorganization of the family.
Meaning of Family Disorganization

In the broadest sense, family disorganization may be thought to include any sort of non-harmonious functioning within the family. Thus, it may include not only the tensions between husband and wife, but those arising between children and parents as well. Tensions between parents and children often present serious problems of adjustment if they are not to result in permanent friction and such disagreements may also result in tensions between husband and wife. However, the children’s conflict with parents does not threaten the family organization to so marked a degree as the conflict between husband and wife over fundamental social values, which makes the rifts more serious, leading to the family disruption. Therefore, our discussion of the family disorganization will be mostly confined to the disruptions of the marriage relationship occasioned by tension between husband and wife. This conjugal relationship is the central bond uniting the family in any society. When this bond is broken, the family is then automatically broken. The existence of the family groups as a functioning unit depends upon the continuation of many personal relationships, which are reciprocal when this relationship is broken there comes the breakdown in the family organization.

Family disorganization in the external manifestation may take the form of desertion, separation, divorce, physical violence or use of abusive language. But these manifestations are only the superficial symptoms of a breakdown in the intimate relationships within the family. The legal or social function of the normal family life may be maintained even when these personal relationships are at a minimum. Family may continue to live under the same roof because of religious beliefs or economic or social motives which may prompt the wife or the husband to live in the marriage bond from which love and affection have since long fled. Similarly, the

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3 For a detailed discussion on Family Disorganization see Memoria’s article on Family Disorganization, 1960.
duty towards children or fear of disapproval of parents may keep them together. In some cases, the outward family life may be maintained while affectionate interests are satisfied elsewhere. At the same time it must be recognized that every normal family experiences conflicts which it is expected to overcome. According to Elliott and Merrill (1961), every man and woman enters marriage from a separate background with different ideas and attitudes borne out of his/ her experiences. Each possesses a scale of values developed out of particular social group. Under the circumstances, it is not surprising that distinctive personality traits of the one may unconsciously irritate the other. Only by integrating the husband’s and wife’s individual desires and attitudes can a successful family life be achieved with a harmonious functioning of the interacting personality. However, it is to be pointed out that tension in family life is growing in the modern age because of the rapid changes in the role and status of the partners.

Thomas and Frmaniecki (1969) state that the specific phenomenon of family disorganization consists in a definite modification of those pre-existing attitudes under the influence of new values, resulting in the appearance of new or different attitudes. The nature of this modification can be generally characterized in such a way that while the attitudes which existed under the family system were essentially “we” attitudes, the new attitudes produced by the new values acting upon those old attitudes are essentially “I” attitudes. While in the “We” attitude the individual did not dissociate himself/ herself from the tendencies and aspirations of his family group, in the “I” attitude the individual’s wishes are separated in his/ her consciousness from those of the other members of his family. This conflict between the two attitudes manifests itself in family discord which would lead to desertion/ divorce.
Memoria (1960) has listed six dimensions of family disorganization: Basically there is a disappearance of a common object and the individual aims are substituted for family aims. The six dimensions are:

1. There is a disappearance of a common object and the individual aims are substituted for family aims,
2. All cooperative effort ceases,
3. Mutual services tend to be withheld,
4. The relationships of husband and wife are no longer coordinated or held,
5. The status of the family in its outer relations to other social groups is altered,
6. The emotional attitudes of husband and wife either become antagonistic or are replaced by attitudes of indifference (p. 28).

**Meaning of Desertion**

*Desertion*, as the term is ordinarily employed, means the irresponsible departure from the home on the part of either husband or wife, leaving the family to fend for itself (Goode, 1963).

According to Eshleman (1978), *desertion* refers to a separation of the spouses that is against the will of one spouse and is intended by the other spouse to end marital life.

According to legal point of view *Desertion* means desertion of the petitioner by the other party to the marriage without any reasonable cause and without the consent or against the wishes of such party, and includes willful neglect of the petitioner by the other party to the marriage and its grammatical variations and cognate expressions (Paras, 1983).
According to the above definitions, there are certain specific conditions or constituent elements of desertion which must be established in order to prove the fact of desertion. They are:

1. **Factum of Separation:** The deserter has in actuality abandoned all matrimonial relation with the other – the deserted spouse. In other words, marital partners must have parted and terminated all forms of joint living.

2. **Animus Deserdendi:** It means, intentions to desert must be there. The deserting spouse must have the real intention to terminate cohabitation permanently but not temporarily. If, however, a spouse abandons the other in a state of temporary passion, anger, annoyance, disgust, etc. or the like, without intending to break the marital bond, it would not amount to desertion.

3. **Absence of Consent:** The deserted spouse must not have agreed or consented to the separation or abandonment of matrimonial obligations and relationships.

4. **Statutory Period:** Desertion or cessation of matrimonial duties and relationship must have continued for a minimum period of two years,

5. **Absence of Reasonable Cause:** Desertion must have occurred without any reasonable ground or cause. The deserter must have left the other spouse on grounds which the law does not accept as valid or legal.

In the modern legal context desertion includes actual desertion, constructive and willful neglect.

1. **Constructive Desertion:** Desertion is a condition and a phenomenon. It is not the withdrawal from a place but from a state of affairs or thing. There may exist a fact of desertion even if both the spouses reside in the same home or roof. Paras Dewan (1983) rightly observes, “to constitute desertion there must be separation of households, not a separation of houses. The parties thus may be in
desertion even if living under the same roof. The only thing required in constructive desertion is that there cessation of actual matrimonial relationship between the spouses even though they live in the same house”.

2. **Willful Neglect**: Willful neglect of matrimonial duties constitutes desertion according to Hindu Marriage Act, 1955. Willful neglect connotes deserters failures or omission to discharge basic marital duties and obligations. It also includes refusal to have marital intercourse, denying maintenance and declining to give company. It would be worthwhile to add here that willful neglect has been deliberately declared equivalent to desertion in Indian social context with a intention to protect the interests of women folk who are the real victim and sufferer on this account.

Desertion is a continuing offence. It remains inchoate till the petition for matrimonial relief is not filed. Desertion becomes complete only when it is reported or brought to the notice of the Court of Law.

According to KBK Singh (2004: 28) a deserted woman refers to such a woman who is not legally separated from her husband but does not enjoy or avail any right and privilege of marital relationship with her husband.

According to Shyamla Pappu (1987), deserted women are those who are deserted by their spouses against their wishes and without reasonable cause⁴.

According to Memoria (1981), desertion may be defined as deliberate abandonment of conjugal society. It indicates a dissolution of marriage unofficially. It means the irresponsible departure from the home

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⁴ However, more than 50 per cent of the respondents, deserted themselves from their husbands without any reason.
on the part of either the husband or the wife leaving the family to tend for itself (1114).

The term ‘desertion’ used in the present study:

Sociological explanation of desertion is somewhat different to the above. According to the *Dictionary of Sociology*, desertion refers to the unannounced cessation of cohabitation between husband and wife without formal divorce, separation or other mutually agreed arrangement for support of family or care of children (Fairchild, 1962).

Both legal and sociological definitions of desertion pinpoint different dimensions of the concept. A broader and more meaningful definition of desertion could be had by taking into account both definitions. It may mean as deliberate severance of actual marital ties by either of spouses with the other living partner without the consent of the latter.

‘Desertion’ refers to a state of relationship where the spouses sever social, sexual and marital relation with each other but are not interested or indifferent to go in for divorce. It is also informally understood and agreed that the spouses are free to re-marry and cease to have any right over each other.

A deserted woman is the one who has been either deserted by her husband or she herself has deserted him, who has severed sexual relation with her husband for reasons best known to herself, resides separately, even away from her spouse, does not want to live with her spouse, and neither wants to seek divorce nor remarry.
Desertion and Divorce

Desertion is a social relationship where both spouses sever marital bonds but legally remain husband-wife. But divorce means judicial dissolution of marital bonds and lose all social, economic, legal and sexual rights. Desertion is a defacto or actual cessation of conjugal rights, obligations and bonds whereas divorce is both defacto and dejure dissolution of marriage. Desertion is a continuing offence but divorce does not involve any penal idea. Desertion generally remains an unannounced and private affair until it becomes a ground for matrimonial relief either for restitution of conjugal life or for divorce, whereas divorce is always public as it leaves a record. Desertion is both temporary and permanent. Temporary desertion forms a part of and ground for divorce. It is also called limited or partial divorce. Thus, divorce is wider than the former in scope. During the state of desertion, husband and wife may or may not live in the same household. But after divorce, both the partners essentially live in separate households. Neither of the spouses (deserteres) is legally entitled to remarry during the period of desertion, whereas divorce restores the right to remarry (Baber, 1953).

The term ‘desertion’ is used in two senses. Desertion as a ground for divorce and desertion as an independent status. Desertion as a ground for divorce as been recognized in Section 13(1), 13(1)(b) and Section 10(i) of the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955. However, desertion meaning severance of conjugal relations and staying separately without any intention to seek divorce is another practice found in all strata of society. A deserted woman is one who is not legally separated from her husband but does not enjoy or avail any right and privilege of marital relationship with her husband.

According to Memoria (1960), in general, there are two types of desertion: the permanent and the temporary. The former has been characterized as the poor man’s divorce. It implies a social break for those
among whom divorce is not in vague, the latter has been characterized as the poor man’s vacation, and is indicative of a low family wage.

According to Truxal and Merril (1953), desertion as a prelude to divorce is one phase of the problem of divorce. Desertion as a more or less permanent status is another and more important problem.

According to Eubank (1916), there are five types of deserters:

1. The spurious deserter is one who leaves his family in order to escape some financial responsibility or secure charitable relief;
2. The gradual deserter is one who is forced to stay away from home by reason of his occupation, or because he is an immigrant staying away from his family and native land;
3. The intermittent husband is one who is chronically a periodic deserter and leaves home at somewhat regular intervals due to some domestic difficulties, and returns when he is free from the difficulty,
4. The ill-advised deserter: This type of deserter is one who deserts wife when he finds that the relationship between them is quite unsatisfactory because of hastily arranged or ill-suited marriage, and
5. The last resort deserter is one who makes a complete break with his family when he finds it difficult to make adjustments with his wife.

The deserters whom Eubank described are men deserters. But there are a large number of women who abruptly desert their husbands and family members and join their natal family and do not return at all to join the family of procreation.

Meaning of “Woman Desertion” in the Present Study

In the present study ‘woman desertion’ refers to those women who have either themselves deserted their husbands or whose husbands have
deserted them and have been living separately without any hope of joining together. Such women may be receiving some financial assistance or income from a piece of land or building. But three conditions are important:

1. The deserted woman should have been living separately but permanently without any conjugal contact with her husband at least for a minimum period of five years,
2. Should have remained unmarried, and,
3. Does not want to seek divorce.

Theories of Women Desertion

Family Disorganization and Woman Desertion: Some Theories

Desertion is a form of behaviour. The sustenance or disruption of marital relations depends on several structural, functional and individual factors. In the following pages a couple of theories related to woman desertion are examined:

1. Functionalist theory,
2. Conflict theory,
3. Incompatibility of familial roles,
4. Stress and strain theory,
5. Family disorganization theory, and
6. Domestic violence theory

1. Functionalist Theory

The functionalist theory explains desertion due to the changing social values in general and those associated with marriage and family. Functionalists like Parson’s (1955) believe that a change in the larger social system will bring about changes in the sub-system. To be precise, changes in the larger society such as education, employment occupation, legal, mass media will bring about changes in the institutions of marriage and family. For example, provisions for education, employment, occupation rights of
women has affected their relationships with husband mother-in-law and other members of the family. Rama Mehta study revealed that the most crucial factors noted for the breaking of marital ties are: women’s education, employment or economic independence upbringing in nuclear family or household which make urban individualistic, conscience and capable of asserting their rights as equal marital partner. In short, changes in larger society will affect changes in the individuals and sub-systems.

2. Conflict Theory

The conflict theory or the Marxist perspective focuses on clash of roles. It means whenever women take to full-time employment they cannot fulfill employment and familial roles effectively. Kapur in her study “Marriage and the Working Women in India” points out that it is not merely the fact of wife’s employed that affects marital relationship but the overall changes in the attitudes of educated urban women brought about by a variety of factors which are operating almost simultaneously in contemporary Indian society.

Employment creates three problems:
1. It increases her physical labour,
2. It increases her financial burden, and,
3. It induces and creates feelings of guilt

In short, desertion may occur due to role conflict of employed women.

3. Incompatibility Theory

Modernization in terms of industrialization, urbanization, formal education, mass media is sweeping the whole world. The formal structure of marriage and family in terms of traditional customs which reflected gender inequality are gradually on the decline. Women are becoming
conscious of their individuality. They are not ready to subordinate themselves to elders and husbands. Relations between women, specially newly married women and family members are becoming individualistic and personal. Relations between members have to be maintained through mutual confidence, trust and faith. Lest there is likely to be breakdown in the system of marriage and family. A majority of the young married couples go in for desertion and divorce because they cannot take each other into confidence and build up a minimum of level of trust.

4. Adolescent Stress and Strain

Adolescence is a period of stress and strains. G.Stanley Hall (1954) is one of those pioneering social scientists who has made noteworthy contributions to the study of adolescence in society. Briefly speaking, Hall said that puberty is a time of great upset, emotional maladjustment and instability in which the adolescent’s moods oscillate between energy and indifference, gaiety and depression. Hall believed that adolescence which begins with the onset of puberty, inevitably involves psychological disturbances or tensions. According to Erikson (1950), adolescence is a turning phase in an individual’s life. It is here he/s he develops his/ her identity.

Age at Marriage and Desertion

Age at marriage and desertion are related with each other. Early marriage between 14-16 years for girls is likely to create marital tensions as the spouses do not know how to relate with each other. They are physically, sexually, socially and ideologically do not know what to expect and what not to expect from each other. Consequently, there are more chances of marital breakdown in the form of desertion/ divorce.
Family Disorganization and Desertion Theory

According to Memoria (1981) and Madan (1965) desertion/divorce are the byproducts of family disorganization.

Family is an organization of relationships, roles and status, power and authority and customs, values and young married spouses, parents and unmarried brothers and sisters and older members constitute three integral units of the family.

Family disorganization refers to deviations from the expected roles and statuses and breakdown in power and authority. Hunger, ill-health and squalor thwart family stability. There are constant infighting among the members for personal ends. In the broadest sense, family disorganization refers to any sort of non-harmonious functioning within the family. Family disorganization includes the tensions between husband and wife, parents and children and between younger older generations. It means loss of faith, trust and confidence and finally breakdown of authority.

Family disorganization manifests in desertions, separations, divorces, court litigation and domestic violence on women, aged and children. Ogburn (1955) has discussed family disorganization as resulting from the loss of functions. In short, woman desertion, as a form of marital conflict, results out of family disorganization.

Domestic Violence on Women and Desertion

Studies conducted on domestic violence indicate that young married women are likely to desert the family due to the violence perpetrated on them. Scriptures reveal that King Rama had abandoned his wife Sita in forests. Manu and Kautilya have exhorted to desert women.
Since time-memorial the family has been unkind and cruel with women similarly in the west, William Blackstone’s 18th Century Codification of the English Common lacks asserted that husbands had the right to physically chastise” an arrant wife, provided the stick was no bigger than his thumb (Pawar, 1988).

The most common family violence against women is the harassment by husbands and in-laws for dowry or any other reason. There are sociologists like William Goode (1971), hold that use of physical force is an integral part of the institution of the family and is one of the means to maintain control in the family. Whatever may be reasons for violence against women, family violence may have negative effect on women’s permanent settlement in the family5.

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