NMML
OCCASIONAL PAPER

History & Society

New Series

100

Marriage and Crises: A Social Biography of Nibhana

Geetika Bapna

Junior Fellow, NMML

Nehru Memorial Museum and Library

2020

Published by

Nehru Memorial Museum and Library
Teen Murti House
New Delhi- 110011

E-mail: director.nmml@gov.in

ISBN: 978-93-84793-29-6

Abstract

The paper marks a new initiative in my decade long ethnographic research on marriage. While I continue with the understanding of the institution as human work of nibhana—a local, ordinary, moral-ethical concept that can be loosely translated as abiding—I have moved substantially towards analysing it in relation to marital crisis. In this shift, I do not frame crisis as inherently pathological and dysfunctional but as an internal and emergent condition of the marital sociality that can be approached through an ethnography of nibhana.

My approach varies from existent studies on marital crises in so far as I depart from two broad established perspectives. One, from how law encounters such crises, at its own terms and at its own doors. Second, from sociological accounts that privilege conflict and deem key crisis-events as the real substance of the institution. I rather start with the questions afresh: what and when is marital crisis? How does crisis tarry between the named and the unnamed? And, in seeking answers to these questions I rely on the practitioner's descriptive conceptualisations.

The ethnography draws from the life history of Mala, a twice married widow. At the cusp of her children getting married now, she, through her own accounts sketches her movement, from a Muslim family in South India to a Sikh marriage in Delhi, into the present of dire constraints. A diffused crisis radiates the family with her own children enacting unresolvable elements of her biographical history of inter-religiosity. I evoke here marriage's internal potential to evolve into situations that bring the practitioners perilously close to an uncertain social brink. However, I also show and argue that this uncertainty is not without simultaneous attempts at reparation and thus crisis has to be sociologically translated through the everyday lenses of ordinary ethics (nibhana) and the voices of the practitioners so that the grammar of this lived sociality becomes available to us.

Keywords: Marriage, Widow, *Nibhana*, Marital Crisis, North and South India, Inter-Religious Marriage, Children, Bereavement, Muslim.

I

Study of marriage as an ethnography of *nibhana*

My decade long ethnographic research, situated in a South Delhi neighbourhood of slums and government residential apartments, is on studying marriage as a lived, everyday, form of social doing.[i] In short, I have come to privilege a subjective account of marriage as a way of life.[ii] The key question that I took to the field was: What does it mean to do marriage? And, the key ethnographic answer I received from my field to the question 'what is marriage all about' is the verb: *nibhana* (*"*शादी तो निभाने की है**"**).[iii] The doing of marriage, in other words, is seen by respondents as a work that is unending and variegated in its demands and returns ("असीमित ज़िम्मेदारियाँ"). I take this asymmetrical description of human work as the lived version of the moral imaginary of marriage.[iv] Even as people strive to achieve this, it seems, the attempt is not to match up with the infinite demands of this doing but is in fact to improvise and cobble together, by the day, a moral and ethical engagement through the ground of nibhana.[v] It is precisely in light of this negotiation with the contingencies of the social that people in the field proposed: the ***doing of marriage is doing of life***. I am speaking of women's voices mainly but it is worth emphasising that marriage here is not foregrounded in a fundamental sexual contract as has been proposed by many authors but is rather conceived, primarily, as a moral and ethical response to the much wider contingent relation of life and the world with respect to the person. Seen in this perspective, going beyond thinking of it as an ideology or a set-up, I have taken to call marriage, as a way of life, what people conceive of *life as proper*. Indeed this idea of the proper may be a cultural demand, a question of honour and face saving but at the same time it is also the register through which intimacy is morally imagined by the practitioners.[vi] The other side of this proper is of course the domain of facing up to the events that unfold within the marital form of intimacy. In this sense marriage is not so much the ritual status of a person but one of the ways in which domesticity, intimacy and self come together into the human work of nibhana that includes dealing with resignation, violence and love as intertwined sites.[vii] My minor contribution then, over this decade long study, is in this carving of a shift from marriage as a self-evident normativity to marriage as a sociality, ethicality and way of life or a human work of nibhana. With this as the backdrop of my larger research concern let me introduce my present work.

II

Moral anthropology of crises in marriage

Into my current work on an ethnography of nibhana I have moved to a slightly counter intuitive way in which an ethnography of nibhana can be sociologically envisaged: How may nibhana and marital

crisis or breakdown co-exist? In the ethnographic witnessing of marriage as a sociality we find a conversation around the abrasive, everyday strife, crises and breakdown, something which otherwise remains in a shadowed presence when marriage is projected as a self-evident normative metaphor. This recognition of conflict becomes possible, as it turns out, by pursuing the doing of marriage precisely in moral terms. My question then is: how might one think of a moral anthropology of crisis in marriage?[viii]

Inaugurating the second decade of my research engagement, my operative line has been to locate how marital crisis is articulated ethnographically, or in other words, by the practitioners themselves. Falling back on earlier studies on the subject in conjunction with my own findings one can indeed arrive at what I call as **specific** and **diffused** domains of marital crises.[ix] Thus marital violence, estrangement, separation, abandonment, death of a spouse may make the list of the specific ones. Overlapping the specific ones, the diffused forms of crisis can be shown descriptively and this is what to a large extent the present essay intends to do. However, what may connect the specific and the diffused crises is what I would call 'emergence and evolution of situations' (Deleuze: 2011).[x] In this vein, the subject of this essay is the life history of a twice married Muslim-Sikh widow and her several children in their inter-religious household from Sector Q of a government residential colony in South Delhi. Its central protagonist is Mala and I provide an ethnographic portrait of the series of challenges that the family must face-up as ever new crises emerge with the unfolding of life and its situations. Although I focus on a single household here, I am hopeful that the case study can provide us with noteworthy insights for our wider understanding of marriage and its relation with crises in the contemporary. Here I build on a minor methodological tradition (See Crapanzano 1980; Das 2007; Goodfellow 2015) in anthropology of seeing the world through individual lives and creating depths of field within which such portraits can become universal sociological mirrors rather than working with the idea of representative samples corresponding to definite generalisations. Before I share with you the partial accounts from Mala and her children's lives, here is a brief note on the field of study.

III

The field and method

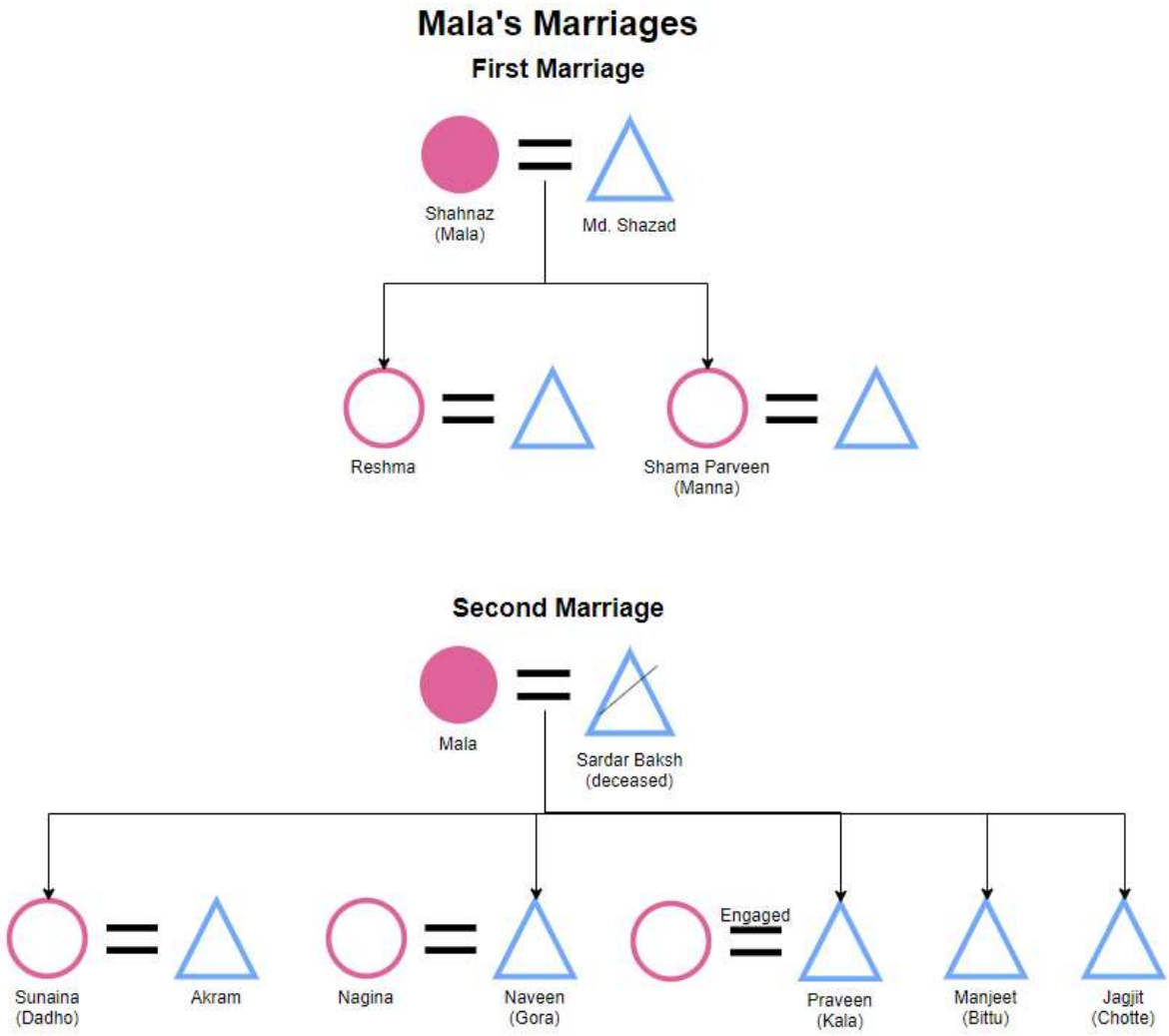
My field is a multi-caste, multi-religious neighbourhood in South Delhi comprising of a government residential colony and slum habitations. Using participant observation and open-ended interviews, I adopt the case study method for its room to accommodate not just specificities of marital life but the broader canvas of life history. In studying marriage of one person it often happens that family becomes a companion concept. Methodologically, I treat this companionship as

conceptual multi-sitedness but I treat marriage as my central station. About life history I must clarify that I do not model it on life cycle but rather in terms of how the person narrates her personalised version of life and its situations.[xi] Thus, I focus on 'situations' as they 'emerge and evolve' in a persons's life history. Notice, as mentioned above, while I narrate life history of a person my claim is that situations are not only of the person in a personal sense of the term but are rather situations of life.[xii] It is in this sense that every person's biography is also a portrait of life in general. Further, in narrating the life history of a person it is inevitable that other characters become significant. This is not an aberration but an objective validation of a very basic sociological maxim that we exist through or in relation to others. The problem here may be one of economy of focus and divergence. So just as between family and marriage I keep returning to marriage in the same vein I keep returning to the main respondent as my key narrator and protagonist of her life history. The technique involved in my research is mainly that of open ended interviews. Before we turn to Mala, a mandatory disclaimer: the names of the places and the people are changed as per the anthropological custom of maintaining the privacy of the persons involved.

IV

Mala's biography: social life of situations

The person whose life history I discuss is a 50 year old, twice married, Muslim (khan) by birth and Sikh as a widow. While she is known to everyone by her Hindu proper name, Mala, she was born and brought up in Bangalore, Karnataka amidst deep poverty and was married to a Muslim man at a young age of fourteen. Her first daughter was born when Mala was 15 and the second when she turned 17. Soon after the birth of the second daughter Mala left her husband for reasons she did not elaborate upon. Mala recollected, 'Manna (Mala's second child) was born when I turned seventeen. At that age, at seventeen, I left him'. As is well known, the anthropological investigation does not believe in prying open all details of the person but rather is attentive to what people reveal and where they let silence speak. Thus, with respect to her severing of ties from her first husband, whether it was him who broke off or she, is less important than Mala's owning up of a narrative of 'leaving her husband'. The other side of this 'leaving the husband' narrative is that Mala took upon herself to be present for her children, especially for their marriages. Her elder children married Muslim spouses and this speaks of the fact that the practise of marrying Muslim was a practical knowledge that she came to rely upon. However, as we shall see, this practise and precedence come to encircle her children, who are borne out of her second marriage to a Sikh husband and although they are raised on the religious observations of *Shabd* and *Guru Parv*, Muslim matches and Muslim names start beckoning them as they marry.



To return to Mala's first marriage, her eldest daughter Reshma is settled in Mysore while the younger one Shama Parveen is married in Kolkata. Mala confided that when she ran away from her first husband she could only take her younger daughter Shama Parveen with her while the older one remained with the father. The latter was married off by the father and Mala saw Reshma for the first time when Reshma turned 28. The occasion was the wedding of Reshma's younger sibling Shama Parveen, who was brought up by Mala's mother in Bangalore.

Mala had passed fifth standard only and the life that awaited her once she left her husband was one of hard toil and uncertainty and it needed much courage and resilience. Seven siblings in all, four sisters and three brothers, all of her kin lived in Bangalore. Even as she returned to her parents' house after leaving her husband, that was only a temporary halt. Mala had a fraught relation with her mother and the unending bickerings and taunts pushed her out of parental refuge, although she held her father in high regard and continues to keep him in the same stead. She left her younger

daughter Shama Parveen to the care of her mother to live life on her own terms, whatever it took. In the early days, wandering from one town to the other, she lived with a Tamil family who provided her refuge and shelter in exchange for a pair of working hands. They could barely pronounce her muslim name Shahnaz and instead nicknamed her Mala.[xiii] Here we witness the first occasion when this slip and switch of name becomes an event in Mala's life. We shall see, this foreboding event of a switch from Shahnaz to Mala, does not go away even in her later life and returns most prominently in her children's lives. After Mala left her husband, her life, she reckoned, was exile-like and she had to witness life-tests on a daily basis. Recalling those years she said:

> I had rented a room for twenty-nine rupees. I took a room but there was no work. I got fed up looking for work but did not find any. Then this Tamil family asked me: 'why don't you live at our house till you find work?' They found a servant for free. They kept chanting Mala, Mala morning to evening. That is how I got renamed as Mala. These Tamil people could not pronounce my name so they started calling me Mala. After leaving him I was forced to bite dust. I lived the full exile of fourteen years. If I left a pair of slippers outside the house, I would find it bitten by a dog. If I left clothes to dry outside, they would disappear. What should I tell you, my dear one, I did not even have proper clothes to wear. When fate goes wrong then all you get in your share are deceits and betrayals.

She eked out a living doing odd jobs like making feather caps, flower garlands and rolling beedis; making incense sticks and breeding silk worms; working the cattle and threshing grain. She would often remark that after class fifth the rest of her education happened through these situations that life confronted her with. In these years she barely managed two meals a day and thriftiness had become her second nature. The emphasis on thrift has to be noted because into the present, her young, adult boys, as we shall see soon, characterise this aspect as the social definition of their mother. Between the odd jobs, Mala at one point worked as a tailor at an export company in Bangalore and that is where she met her second husband Sardar Baksh (SB). Baksh, a Sikh, hailed from Patiala, Punjab. Mala told me that Baksh ('He') at first did not believe her when she said that she was a mother of two children. She did not keep him in dark about her previous marriage. Speaking of that time she said, 'He was also confused. He used to tell me that you are not married and you are actually lying to me. But I was very clear I did not want to marry through deception'. She married SB when Shama Parveen was six years old. They married four times, first at the mosque, then a temple, then the court and finally at the Gurudwara.[xiv] After their marriage, Mala and SB moved to Delhi. They worked and lived in different parts of the city but SB never took her to his ancestral village and she barely knew his kin. This absence of the father's side of the family, as we shall see later, becomes more pronounced with Sardar Baksh's death. In fact with him gone, his existence acquires an irreality amongst his children. In Delhi, Mala worked as a tailor in

different corners of the city and for a short while she also worked as a nurse at a dispensary. SB meanwhile had found a clerical position in the Ministry of Defence, Government of India. Together SB and Mala have five children: the eldest daughter Sunaina, the twin boys, Naveen and Praveen, and two more sons thereafter, Manjeet and Jagjit. The family lived at Ambedkar Basti in South Delhi and when a residential quarter was allotted to SB within the government housing colony they put that out on rent and continued to live in the basti. Much later when the children grew up they all moved to the government quarters. Her marriage to SB had its own share of troubles and affirmations. Mala hinted that Sardar Baksh was wavering in his marital commitment and she often sensed the harrowing possibility of abandonment. However, Mala was steadfast in her belief and held them together by observing the daily routine of offering Namaz, lighting the diya each evening, visiting temples and keeping fasts. Reconciling with her second marriage involved fabricating this new self that renewed her pact with different religious sites as part of her everyday. Veena Das (2010) in an essay discussing a similar context of a Hindu-Muslim mixed marriage shows how such inter-religious marriages involve a kind of becoming where not just familial affiliation but the spouse's religiosity becomes integral and gets incorporated in the remaking of the self.[xv] It is in this sense that remarriage seems to involve a re-fabrication of her self that continues and persists into her present when she is bereaved and the second husband is gone.[xvi] A year before I met Mala, SB had died in a road accident when his scooter was hit by a Qualis (a Toyota SUV). An interesting detail emerged here in one of my conversations with Mala. The scooter's registeration number was 'nau do gyrah, 9211' (the phrase simply says 9+2=11 but as a popular idiom may mean any of the following: Scram! Vanish! Disappear from the scene instantly) and Mala said she had a premonition of something untoward happening. She reminisced:

> I had an intuition that there would be some trouble. I used to tell their (her children's) father that something untoward will happen to someone. Let us leave this house for a few days. Vacate it for a few days and move elsewhere. Let's go anywhere, let's leave this place for a few days. He did not listen to me and the perilous force took him away.

Life changed course once again for Mala. If I were to describe very briefly the current situation and the presence-absence of Sardar Baksh, the following registers become very prominent. SB as the husband, father and a bread winner figure emerges through the police file. Since his death Mala has been ever searching for witnesses to corroborate her version of how the accident happened. The bargain Mala is involved in, through this file as the basis, is about fetching SB's job for herself or one of her sons while she also hopes to keep the allocated accommodation on extension. In the narratives of the house, SB as father and husband is invoked through the accident and the

apparatuses of compensation due to a government employee. Questions of money and imminent evacuation haunt the everyday. The evacuation would result in Mala going back to the basti. A return that would mark a fall for her not just in socio-economic terms but importantly in terms of destroying her future and hope oriented human work of nibhana, that she and SB observed in toiling together, bringing children into the world and raising them including the children from her earlier marriage. However, in order to understand the economics within this matrix of the marital and the familial we must find a way to approach Mala's present through a different set of details. I turn to one of the occasions during my visit when an everyday conversation led the children of the house to show me the family album maintained meticulously by one of the twins. As the album opened, pictures gazed at the onlookers from their stilled living moments and conversations emerged that provided a more nuanced portrait of the presence and absence of Sardar Baksh and that of Mala as the wife and the mother. You will notice that Manjeet fetching the album and opening this conversation is not an incidental episode, it relays the asserting presence of the children in the family who in their own ways are trying to find a sociology of their parents' marriage. This painful effort becomes the sharpest descriptive register to note the tones of bereavement in the children where death of one parent becomes an undeclared ground for them to reflect on their parents' marriage. The death indeed becomes a situation that allows the children on one hand to evaluate their parent's marriage and on the other, to conflate in their perspective the death of the mother's husband as death of her marriage.

So it is not surprising that Mala must mourn for SB in two separate ways, one by participating in the children's laments and evaluation of her erstwhile marriage and in another way by continuing her observations of *vrat*, lighting lamps and by visiting the Gurudwara regularly.[xvii]In this sense, for Mala, the key question is not whether her marriage is dead or not but rather how she must reorganise herself yet again, this time in the absence of her spouse. At this note let me move to a more detailed account of the family album conversation, following which I will close the discussion by reiterating my central arguments using the substantive themes raised in the essay.

The album conversation

As the album opens, we get to see a couple of pictures of Mala right in the beginning. In one, she is dressed as a petrol station attendant and in another as a nurse. As I have been saying the case history provides us with a life and biography that is different from life-cycle and the photo album seems to tally. The beginning of Mala, as the preceding discussions maintain, is not through mapping of a family line but through a mapping of initiatives, hard work and learning on the jobs. Soon, these few pictures that must have been clicked by her colleagues at work places give way to pictures of

toddlers and then we see that their school photos are missing and soon their wedding photos emerge. As we turn to the children now, the children of Mala and SB, I continue with the context of conversation created by the family album but I also fill in details about the children so that their lives become intelligible.

All the children of Mala and Sardar Baksh, particularly the boys, were pitched from a young age into shouldering the responsibilities of running the household in whatever ways they could. They told me that they did odd jobs while they were at school, working as waiters at parties, cleaning cars in the morning, occasional jobs of whitewashing houses and so on. All of them without exception found it hard to cope with the culture of schooling at KV where they were enrolled. Not surprisingly they gradually dropped out from the formal system, one by one, and joined the Open School system. Naveen failed class seven twice and was forced to drop out. Manjeet failed thrice, once in standard sixth and twice in ninth. Manjeet recalls that his father used to tell him if you can't study and you want to make a life then you must join the army or police. But his brothers thought otherwise. Who could live away from the family for such a long time? As mentioned earlier, when I first met the family during fieldwork, SB was no more. Owing to his death, the twin brothers Naveen and Praveen, referred to by all in the family as Gora and Kala, had started working as drivers in the neighbourhood. Praveen later switched to computer typing and data entry after he got fed up with the driving job and felt dizzy driving. The youngest son, Jagjit, still at school, got into small time drugs and has since fallen in bad company.

Children's marriages

The eldest daughter Sunaina was married off when SB was still alive, while Naveen (one of the twin brothers) got married to Nagina soon after SB's death. Sunaina was married off to a Muslim boy by Mala secretly. Mala went to Bangalore on the pretext of visiting her kin and married her off there in a quick ceremony. She told me that she had tried disclosing to SB about the Sikh daughter and Muslim husband match but Sardar Baksh did not concur. Sensing that he was not following up on the girl's marriage she took upon herself to get her married. The marriage was not attended by any of Sunaina's brothers and there was an overwhelming feeling of hurt and betrayal felt by all. Praveen casually whispered to me during one of my visits that at one point SB had left his mother. I did not find an opportunity to follow up on this disclosure. After Sunaina, Naveen too married into his mother's side of the family. In fact he was married to his parallel cousin Nagina (Mala's sister's daughter) at Bangalore. I had the opportunity to see his wedding photos. He was dressed in a white kurta pyjama with a skull cap and the *sehra* covering half his face. Manjeet described to me the awkward moments at the wedding back there at Bangalore. He reckoned that unlike here where the

bride and the groom sit together, over there he was sitting garlanded next to his brother on the wedding couch. At Bangalore, Naveen became Nabeez and Praveen became Pervez and the children found themselves amongst a set of kin with unfamiliar names and little known histories of relatedness. Just a few months after Naveen's wedding, Praveen also got engaged to a girl in Bangalore. When I enquired about the girls's name Mala, on one pretext or the other, ignored my question. I later discovered in a private conversation with Nagina that Praveen's fiancee was a Muslim too. With respect to Nagina, even as Mala had got one of her own kin as daughter-in-law, the aunt and niece did not go along. Mala-Nagina had regular squabbles and vocal battles (*sunna-sunana*) over household responsibilities. Mala complained that Nagina woke up at nine A.M by which time all housework was done. Mala was also critical of Nagina's proximity with Praveen as the cousins had grown up together. Since Praveen was a frequent visitor to Bangalore they were casually intimate with each other. After much petty fighting, squabbling and exchanging insults Naveen and Nagina, as an informal arrangement, set up a separate kitchen and stopped contributing to larger household expenses, even as they frequently ate at and used Mala's kitchen. Mala grudged about Naveen not handing a regular income to her to run the household and Praveen idling away time at home and interfering in household matters instead of looking for gainful employment. She fretted over children's irregular employment and bickering over expenses and income and sharing of responsibilities constituted the daily texture of life within the household. Even though from a very young age the children, particularly the twins, had shared the weight of life with their mother the fractured interests in the household came to the fore when both Naveen and Praveen would tell Mala to give them their respective share of the family property. Mala on the other hand reasoned that if she were to do that then the money would not last even for a year. They would squander it all. But even with all the squabbles, Mala had great endearment for all her boys and understood their frustration with her tight hand and saving ethic. The impending worry that nonetheless made Mala sick was the anticipation of the legal notice to vacate the quarters as SB was now dead. Mala was clear that she did not want to go back to living in the slums but that possibility was indeed a very real one. With the help of a lawyer Mala had filed for a case to get her husband's job but she said her case was very weak and the wait continued.

Let me once again focus back on the entire family including Sardar Baksh as a site of reflection and discussion. In the backdrop discussion of Praveen's hush-hush engagement to a Muslim match, Mala defended that even when SB was around she used to both light the lamp to the Hindu pantheon as well as read the namaz. Corroborating her testimony in front of her children are the walls of the house that have many posters of Hindu Gods, as well as that of Guru Nanak and also

holy words from the Quran. Idols of Vishnu, Ganesh, Hanuman, Sai Baba, and Shiv Shankar adorn her *pooja* shelf. Mala reads the namaz twice a day, even now. Along with namaz, she also reads a rosary each of the Gayatri mantra, Surya dev, Shiv Shankar, and the Kalma. Although Nagina did read the namaz back at Bangalore, her brother-in-law Praveen told me she was irregular here. On the evening of Guru Nanak's birthday Mala called her to light a lamp. Nagina did not oblige Mala and the latter was visibly upset. The twins Naveen and Praveen were overtly critical of their mother's unsettled, ambivalent position with respect to religion and her inability to choose in either/or terms. Father read Gurbani, Mother reads namaz, the children lament. None of the children know the disciplined observance of namaz or the gurbani. In this regard, the worry of Mala's second generation was palpable. Nagina once remarked in a moment of candidness to me that God alone knows what will we make of our children. If it's a girl then one can postpone that decision, if it's a boy then one will have to decide, what will we make of him a Hindu, Sikh or a Muslim. Not that this question is settled for Mala herself. After SB's death the children asked her once what should we do with you when you die, burn or bury? Mala fumed (as the children put it '*ye chid gaye'*) and after that an uneasy bitterness and silence hung in the house. Another time Mala had confided in me, none of my people are here, when I die I know they will burn me.

Let me pause here to make a few summary observations about the overall thematics of the essay that touch upon practitioners' understanding of marital crisis and the potentials of crisis that emerge out of the form of marriage itself.

V

Conclusion

The anthropologist Veena Das (1976) in a well known essay on kinship studies titled 'Masks and Faces', uses Erving Goffman's (1975) metaphor of front stage and back stage in the presentation of natural and cultural selves in everyday life, to show that what is generally considered as a duplicity and double speak is actually a site of moral and ethical engagement in how marriage and family are conducted. Invariably then the various faces of front, back, neutral and inadvertent stages simultaneously hold together the social doing of marriage and family. What we have in case of Mala's unfolding story of marriage is that ***crisis*** is when, in almost an unseen but slow and gradual ascendance of tempo, this demand of maintaining the front and back stages (maternal line gets highlighted for the children in terms of family and intimacy) has become a burdensome inheritance to the children. That Sardar Baksh and she could still maintain it (inter religious marriage) was their human work of nibhana, notwithstanding SB's desertion of Mala for a brief period. The children constantly highlight the impossibilities borne out of the situations of past, hinting at her life history

of two marriages and the inheritance of unmanageable inter-religiosity. However, at this moment I would like to go to anthropologist Cheryl Mattingly (2014) and her work on family peril. Mattingly's ethnography on African-American families and their severely disabled children foregrounds people's arduous ground projects of care and beliefs about good in the face of the most trying, even contra-life circumstances. In studying marriage and family, from the point of view of the ethnographic that is not reliant on the juridical understanding of marital crisis, the question we gain from her work is how crisis and its resolution are social entanglements that people live through. Thus, Mattingly's concern is not so much in a social cataloguing of forms of misery and oppression but she rather focuses on how people narratively respond (stoically) to the contexts and circumstances that they find themselves in. Her answer, an answer that privileges life as different from *life cycle*, is that what otherwise would not have been a choice to the same people becomes a choice at this stage. This is what she argues, drawing from Veena Das (2007) that choices made at this stage involve a sense of descent but it is also the case that soon a ground of 'second chances' provides a gradual, hopeful blending back into the ordinary (Mattingly 2015: 208). The reference here, in Das and Mattingly, is to the link between crisis and hope in terms of a certain kind of ethicality of waiting, patience and second chance. No doubt this ground of second chance and hope is not just about things turning eventually right but in fact a fuller acknowledgement of life's capacity to go wrong in unforeseen ways. In case of Mala with her husband gone ironical as it may sound, but it seems that Mala's second chance may lie with her children, the same children who must find some anchor and patterns in their evaluation of their parents' marriage. If we combine this life history of Mala with the classical trope of 'domestic cycle' in anthropology then from the stable of sociology of marriage and this particular study of marital crisis we can say that marriage as a way of life and intimacy breaks and differs but also returns through its second chances.[xviii]

References

Bapna, Geetika. 2016. The Contemporary Meanings of Marriage. Ph.D Dissertation submitted to the Department of Sociology, University of Delhi.

_____. 2012. Marriage, Language and Time: Towards an Ethnography of Nibhana. *Economic and Political Weekly*, October 27, vol. xlvii no. 43.

Basu, Srimati. 2015. *The Trouble with Marriage: Feminists confront Law and Violence in India.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Chatterjee, Anasua. 2017. *Margins of Citizenship: Muslim experiences in Urban India*. New Delhi: Routledge.

Choudhary, J.N. 1998. *Divorce in Indian Society: A Sociological study of Marriage Disruption and Role Adjustment.* Jaipur: Printwell Publishers.

Crapanzano, Vincent. 1980. *Tuhami: Portrait of a Moroccan.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press

Das, Veena. 1976. Masks and Faces: An essay on Punjabi Kinship. *Contributions to Indian Sociology* n.s. 10 (1): 1-30.

_____. 2007. *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

_____. 2010. 'Engaging the life of the Other: Love and Everyday life' in Michael Lambek ed. *Ordinary Ethics: Anthropology, Language and Action*. New York: Fordham University Press.

_____. 2012. 'Ordinary ethics'. In *A Companion to Moral Anthropology*, edited by Didier Fassin,133-149. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

_____. 2015. 'What Does Ordinary Ethics Look Like' in Four Lectures on Ethics: Anthropological Perspectives. Edited by Michael Lambek, Veena Das, Didier Fassin, and Webb Keane, 53-126. Chicago: HAU Books.

Deleuze, Gilles, Claire Parnet. 2011. Gilles Deleuze from A to Z. Directed by Pierre-Andre Boutang and translated by Charles J. Stivale (DVD edition).

Goffman, Erving. 1975. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Penguin Books.

Goodfellow, Aaron. 2015. *Gay Fathers, Their Children, and the Making of Kinship*. New York: Fordham University Press.

Lambek, Michael. 2010. Ordinary Ethics: Anthopology, Language and Action. New York: Fordham University Press

Lizy, James. 1999. *Family counselling in Family Court: An Analysis of Psycho-social Dynamics of Family of Litigants*. Thiruvananthapuram: Centre for Development Studies.

Mattingly, Cheryl. 2014. *Moral laboratories: Family Peril and the Struggle for a Good Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Mehta, Rama. 1975. *Divorced Hindu Woman*. Delhi: Vikas Publishing House

Mody, Perveez. 2008. *The Intimate State: Love- Marriage and the Law in Delhi.* New Delhi: Routledge.

Nespital, Helmut 1997. Dictionary of Hindi Verbs. Allahabad: Lokbharati Prakashan

R. Usha Devi. 1998. *Divorced Women: Socio-psychological Problems*. New Delhi: APH Publishing.

Vatuk, Sylvia. 2017. *Marriage and its Discontents: Women, Islam and the Law in India.* New Delhi: Women Unlimited.

Endnotes

[i]Building on existing scholarly contributions, I approach the living component (both the facts of marriage as a living institution as well as the living of one's own marriage) of the institution on the lines of a moral anthropology of marriage. This approach uses the critical background of previous studies, especially feminist and queer, and is alert to the contemporary projection of the death of the institution that once was seen as the privileged host of moral and civil conjugality. A quick note on the terms as I use them:
By lived I mean practitioners' understanding. By everyday I wish to convey that I depart from the tradition of studying marriage as a life cycle or a ritual event and rather focus on internal, daily events of marriage that mark its movement. By social doing, I imply that although I am studying individuals, by listening to their voices about how they understand the inner world of marriage I am invested in locating: 1) how social symbols are personalised in a biography and 2) how thought and practise come together in the reflective domain of these voices.

[ii]I say privileging of the subjective to highlight the deliberate inversion of the position that the objective occupies as such. However, the subjective does not mean an autonomous and exclusive individualistic voice because language is moored into social symbols and situations. As mentioned earlier, the idea is to explore how social symbols and situations become personalised and how this process of personalisation resonates as a social doing and human work with another person even though the two may not share the same context or culture.

[3]The Hindi verb nibhana, is a very rich term. It would rather lend itself to multiple usages than to a single descriptor. Therefore, I will continue using the term without substituting it with a translated English word, although, if one were to choose an equivalent it would be something like the English word 'abiding'. Some of the lexical meanings of the term and the correlating verbal expressions would be as follows: 'to have done' (one's duty), 'to keep' (a promise, eventually with some effort, against one's expectations), 'to fulfill' (a duty, a formality), 'to maintain' (one's friendship), 'to stand by', 'to pull on', 'to last', 'to continue' (a companionship for a certain period of time) 'to carry on' (one's responsibilities). For further reference please see Helmut Nespital (1997). This key concept of nibhana emerged from the field that eventually led me to conceptualise my work as an 'Ethnography of nibhana'. What becomes an interesting feature of its usage is that it enjoys a wide currency and transcends differences of caste, class and religiosity. This is affirmed through my fieldwork where the Muslim interlocutors used it in the same way as the Hindu interlocutors although their doings may be different. As a named moral concept it is one of those rare breeds that seems to be easily travelling between the two worlds and is available to both the Hindu and the Muslim. In my usage, I privilege the verb as an ethnographic concept, specifically in the following two ways: One, how does this verb play out in the context of intimacy? And two, I emphasise practitioner's meanings hinged to real life

observances. I show that it is through an ethnography of nibhana that we begin to understand and grasp what I call the 'inner life of marriage'. This approach has allowed me to build on previous contributions of marriage studies with an acute attentiveness to practitioner's accounts of how marriage works in everyday terms and sustains the consistency of the ordinary through complex rhythms of habits, routines, familiarity, marital love as well as corrosion of domestic violence and resignation. Seen this way, marriage becomes an assemblage of responsibility, sacrifice, labour, care, children, fate, love, violence, pleasure and resignation. In short, marriage becomes a definition of life itself. For an extended discussion on an ethnography of nibhana see Geetika Bapna (2012, 2016).

[4]I use human work in the sense that the accent is not on body or mind as determined and instrumental sites of labour but on the doing of the social. The usage of work closely echoes the field narratives of how people think of marriage as work, as a certain kind of work of life. Undoubtedly, in this evocation there is reference to physical and emotional labour but this is subsumed within the narrative continuities of marital and familial relatedness. In other words, this work is not unto itself. It is a work involved in the making and unmaking of kin. It is also a concept of work that involves its own effacement and does not overtly seek a surface of names to create an archive and inventory of its own doings. The use of human is, thus, deployed as a shorthand to the interlacing domains of natural and cultural kinship.

[5]The demands of the social often involve an excess. To participate in the moral does not mean to participate in fulfilling all moral demands, but rather how do we translate them in the everyday.

[6]It is worth mentioning that imperatives do not have to be external, neither must they necessarily come from normative 'authorities'. Indeed an imperative could be a subjective register to relate the self with the world.

[7]The descriptive accounts of nibhana lead us towards the ironic quality of marriage as a form of social relatedness. The ironic, I show, resides at the heart of marriage as an institution and becomes visible when we juxtapose the unanimity of marriage as a 'proper' way of life in relation to its lived everyday which in practitioners' account is imbued with a strong sense of resignation about marriage. This ironic quality of marriage as a lived form lies in the fact that the acknowledgement of this concurrent stream of resignation does not diminish marriage as an institution but people participate and engage with it, in it, in ardour and lament. For a more detailed discussion on this refer, Bapna, Geetika. 2016. *The Contemporary Meanings of Marriage*. Ph.D Dissertation submitted to the Department of Sociology, University of Delhi.

[8]As a perspective, moral anthropology/anthropology of morality is concerned with the place of the ethical within human life. In using this approach, I rely on a set of scholarly writings that have put forth the notion of 'Ordinary ethics'— the idea that ethical practice need not be imagined at a distance from ordinary life but

the other way around. See Lambek (2010) and Das (2012, 2015). Morality, ordinary life, ethics and everyday thus become a conceptual family around which I work in my ethnographic endeavour. In my decade-long engagement with this approach, the one local concept that comes to stand as a named constellation for the family of concepts mentioned above is, 'nibhana'.

[9]There have been several studies on crises in marriage that enumerate what I refer to as the specific domain of marital crises. See Rama Mehta (1975); Usha Devi, R (1998); Choudhary, J.N (1998); James Lizy (1999); Srimati Basu (2015) and Sylvia Vatuk (2017).

[10]Contemporary anthropology has locked horns in opposing the ordinary with the evental. My ethnographic sense is that one way out of this standoff is to resort to recording 'situations' where it may not be as important to ethnographically judge situations as ordinary or evental as recording the course of situations. The occurrence and evolution of situations then becomes the modality through which marriage is narrativised. Having said that, I must mention that I draw inspiration from works that privilege the ordinary as a site of understanding the human rather than the evental which considers the extra-ordinary as the purer signature of the human and the social. On the ordinary see, Veena Das (2007).

[11]This is how I build on Vincent Crapanzano's (1980) *Tuhami*. While Crapanzano focuses on how symbols are personalised my work takes that into account along with privileging the force of situations within the person's life. Life itself becomes an excessive repository of situations, possibilities and potentials.

[12]Situations of life become available to the ethnographer through the narratives of what the person says she has gone through or going through. There is also a way in which a trail of such incidents occupy the present of the person. People close to the person relate with her through their knowledge of these situations, their occurrences and perceived effects.

[13]See Anasua Chatterjee (2017) on how Muslims seeking public lives have Hindu sounding or ambiguous names. Characteristic is to adopt common, onomatopoetic, names of endearment that do not give away the religious identity.

[14]Scholars of Anthropology have worked on non-familial settings of weddings: the court wedding or the temple wedding. Perveez Mody's (2008) work on court marriage of runaway couples is particularly instructive. She shows how the court wedding becomes a scene of legitimacy and back up while the supplicative conviction and mutual trust between the couple that they are indeed married to each other involves the religious sites invariably. It is in this sense that one must read the poetics of marrying four times: at mosque, temple, court and the Gurudwara. The poetics is in the reiterative announcement to their mutual selves. It is not hard to guess that when she says married at mosque, temple, court and Gurudwara,

barring the court ritual she does not mean *nikah, phera*, *anand karaj* respectively but rather how their marital selves are grounded in their personal swearing at these religious sites.

[15]In the essay 'Engaging the life of the Other: Love and Everyday life' Veena Das (2010) provides an account of a Hindu-Muslim marriage where the Hindu boy gradually finds himself beckoned into the world of Islamic religiosity and takes it upon himself to learn the Quran and read namaz. He even takes up a Muslim name in the presence of his wife's kin. In a similar vein the Muslim girl when speaking of the purification ceremony and her conversion to a Hindu name says that although they both knew that the purification ceremony was only for the purpose of the marriage, deep down she was drawn to the idea of *puja* thinking that this is what her spouse had grown up seeing and doing. Thus we find in this lived account of the Hindu-Muslim marriage a complex enactment and layering of the religious selves of the spouses.

[16]It would hold true for any marriage but particularly in the case of intermarriage, one has to ask the question that what continues of marriage even after the death of the husband (spouse). The demand between people of two religious persuasions seems to be that the spouse appears as a heightened embodiment of virtual elements of social alterity that have to be negotiated.

[17] Mourning has often been thought of in terms of ritual action and remembrance. A yet another way to think of mourning is in terms of an open time, a time that is always open to the return of grief. Such a mourning gets absorbed in everyday existence. It is in this latter sense that one has to record the evocation of the father and his deeds. What is really moving in this account is that when they are mentioning the father's death, they talk of the parents' marriage in the past tense. From the perspective of the children it is the marriage too which has died.

[18]One intriguing question that this ethnographic account raises for us is that with the death of a spouse what happens to that individual marriage as a form of life? One of the ways in which this question has been addressed within anthropological literature is through the discussion on widowhood and its associated marginality. But the widowhood discussion does not take into account that the death of a spouse is not the death of a marriage. This is in fact then a question that I gain through this work that how might one think of marriage as a form of life with the death of the spouse. Nibhana, as noted earlier, becomes one register of hope and future.