

## Free to Love

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This is in reponse to your piece on *Love and Marriage* in **Manushi** (No.80). I had a variety of reactions. I tried to write a response from several perspectives. I was ultimately left with my personal experience that is so present to me now (I am now on my way back to Wisconsin to face the final divorce decree in court). Divorce was as unwelcome as death. For a time, it was more unwelcome than death. And it came with as much choice. But it was mine. I had to accept it.

It made me question my marriage, myself, marriage itself. I don't have a lot of answers. But in all my agony, the death of my dreams, the dreams of my death, this I know. I loved my husband. I may always. I loved mar-

# Love & Marriage

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**Since the article *Love and Marriage* (Manushi 80) has generated a lot of controversy, we are publishing some more responses to it in a special *Discussion* column rather than in the usual *Letters* column so as to give adequate space to the criticism levelled at this piece.**

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riage. And my love was not perfect. For all the loneliness I feel now and the lost opportunity (the time has passed for a family), I never wish it never happened. Once again, it is like death - for who would say upon the death of someone you loved "I wish that person had never existed."

Something else I know without doubt - in any debate about marriage, whether it be a "love marriage" or an

"arranged marriage", the casualty should not be love. Divorce and death are not the enemy - the enemy is never living and never loving.

We are not made with a finite capacity for love. We can love as much and whomsoever we wish for as long and as strong as we are able. As for myself, you can force divorce upon me, you can even take my life, but you can never stop me from loving. Now,

I'm free to love even more - but perhaps more wisely.

**Bonita Mae Eiden, Oregon, U.S.A.**

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### Romance vs. Security

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I just finished your article entitled *Love and Marriage*. I think you presented the "arranged marriage" perspective, with which I am less familiar than the "love marriage" perspective, very well. As for "love marriages", long-lasting ones are few and far between from what I can see. The problems of broken marriages here in Canada do not have the same social consequences as in India, such as the woman being shunned by society or abandoned by her family. However, the parent who has custody of the children (usually, but not always, the mother) is frequently left with two difficult choices: the parent can accept government financial support and stay at home with the children, or the parent can go out and work leaving the children to be raised by baby sitters, TV, video games etc. which so many parents use today to keep their children occupied. I do realize how very lucky single parents here in Canada are to have financial support offered by the government.

The efforts of the woman's and the man's family to find a suitable marriage partner and continuing support for the couple could, in my opinion, help the couple to build a successful marriage. I use the word "build" because in these times of rapid change, a lot of effort has to go into making a marriage endure.

Statistics show that the self-arranged marriage and the nuclear family no longer have the high success rate that they had in my parents' day. Maybe an arranged marriage lacks the short term romantic beginning but marriage as an ultimate long term

commitment and the exciting, glowing beginning of "falling in love" can be easily balanced out by a long-term secure relationship including the families of both the partners.

**Barbara Gauthier, Vankleck, Canada**

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### A Happy Medium

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Here's my personal response to your views on *Love and Marriage*. These are two aspects of relationships between the sexes, though I would prefer to use the phrase "sexual attraction" (however inadequate) for "love" or "romance" which I am not sure I really understand.

Sexual attraction is Nature's way of ensuring continuance of the species in all animals. In human beings, it is compounded by physical as well as mental and psychological elements. Persons change over time due to several factors. Naturally, compatibilities alter. That is why sexual attraction will probably not last a lifetime. Human children need care and attention for several years to grow up in order to become balanced adults. A permanent arrangement like marriage serves the purpose of providing them with the required stability.

To what extent can marriage and sexual attraction go together? The arranged marriage sacrifices the latter for the former unless we believe that any two people forced into living together can automatically find sexual fulfilment. (It is difficult enough to achieve physical compatibility after weeks of knowing a person.) To put an "arranged marriage" on a higher level than a "love marriage" is also to say that sexual attraction is of little value or that it should be fulfilled only outside marriage.

But should sexual attraction be looked down upon? It does not often

last throughout a lifetime but it is intense and very fulfilling. Must an experience lose all its worth just because it cannot last for ever? A life of repression sacrificed to a familial or societal tyranny is not necessarily preferable to the satisfaction of a person's individual emotional needs. If the Western ideal of unbridled individual satisfaction is dangerous, so is the Indian one of endless repression of normal impulses.

"Love marriage" is built on the hope that the needs of the individual and of society can somehow be reconciled. This inherent difficulty is worsened because women are not equals in their dealings with men, sexually or socially. No wonder there is violence, injustice and cruelty to women and children in both kinds of marriages. In the nature of things, perhaps, women might always be at a slight disadvantage due to their responsibility of childbearing and consequently greater involvement in child rearing. Sexual attraction is not based on logic and leads even the best people to experience uncontrollable feelings like jealousy. Yet, equitable relationships can exist free of mindless violence and purposeless submission where the needs of individuals and of society are both met by persons who take responsibility for their actions.

There are no easy ways out; certainly not by sacrificing personal choices as society or family dictates. We must each learn to live fully while enduring the consequences of our actions. A more equal society would at least bring this within the grasp of women. Such a society is far from attainment in the East as well as in the West.

**Renuka Viswanathan, Bangalore**