

Readers' Forum

Readers' Forum is a new feature in Manushi. Readers often send us long letters sharing their thoughts and providing new insights into issues or situations that Manushi may not have dealt with before. Often these submissions do not fit the format of articles. Therefore, we are introducing a Readers' Forum - a space in which you can share thoughts, views and experiences with others. Letters that come to us in response to specific Manushi articles or to the magazine itself will be published separately under the new title: Responses to Manushi.

== Marriage Dilemmas ==

I received your letter and it encouraged me to share some of my personal feelings with you. One recent incident made me want to write to you and share my feelings which I could not do with my friends or relatives (though you are unknown to me).

I am in my early 30s, working in the university. I have done my M.A. All my sisters and my brothers are settled. I don't have any responsibility. After I finished my M.A., I stayed at home for one year since I didn't get any job. At that time I decided not to marry, but didn't tell anybody. After two or three years my family tried to get me married. Since I had decided not to marry I rejected some proposals, other proposals dropped by themselves. But I didn't cooperate with my family members regarding "formalities" like treating the bridegroom party, etc., because I hate it very much. Because of this I got into a fight with my brother and left home three years back without taking anything. I moved to a new city where a friend helped me to get a job. I have not yet gone back to my home. My mother is with me now, but all my sisters, relatives and friends are angry with me since I didn't accept the proposals.

A few months back I got one proposal from my sister who is living

abroad. First I agreed because I couldn't refuse my sister, who did much for our family. But then I rejected it and told her I couldn't accept it. So in some way I lost a close relationship with her. But that person (who is a colleague of my sister) came here last week to meet me. I spent half a day with him. He is a nice person. He is from another state, eight or nine years older than me, and belongs to a different caste. I think he liked me and wanted a positive reply from me. But since I am still in confusion whether to marry or not,



and I felt we had some barriers between the two of us, I replied to him in the same way. Now I am feeling "Did I make a mistake?" by rejecting him, and losing an opportunity.

Now I will tell my inhibitions for marriage. Everybody says I am beautiful and good in everything (I got the comment that I am too proud of my beauty, that is why I am rejecting all proposals). But I feel I lack something. I want to be something more than what I am now. For example, I want to be a good speaker, or present a paper in a seminar, or write something good. But I cannot do all those things. I don't have confidence. I

feel I am not intelligent enough and at times I don't like my behaviour also. If I have close contact with people, talk freely and do something I will get a permanent job. But I do not want to do that. I will wait for it until it comes on its own. For this I have to suffer personally (financial and mental worries). I don't like to ask others for anything. I know I cannot do some work without others' help. If I want to do research I must get cooperation and help from professors, guides, colleagues, et cetera, which I find difficult to get.

I don't keep close contact with anybody. I'd like to, but I do not want to sacrifice anything to have it. I like to be alone. Besides I feel my luck is not favourable as compared to that of others. I am leading a peaceful life but I feel I am suffering. My sisters used to call me to their place, but I don't like to go. I won't attend any function as I do not like to mingle with people. I am afraid if I marry and have children they may get this nature which I do not want.

I don't want to give dowry and spend thousands of rupees for marriage. But if I agree to an arranged marriage, I have to tolerate all these things which I wouldn't otherwise. I have to select my partner on my own, which is not possible because I don't have any chance to come in contact with gents. Even if I do, I don't like

them in one way or another. So marriage has become a big problem for me. Whether to marry or not? How should he be? How to marry? Sometimes I feel if I get a person who is suitable for me, I will marry him. But I am not sure I will accept him. I am not clear what I want.

I am tired of thinking about marriage. Because of this everyone is going away from me. How can I overcome this problem? Shall I give my mother a chance to find a bridegroom for me? Shall I say that I want to marry a person who is equal to me in qualifications, with a permanent job, and with a normal physical appearance? If I give a chance to my mother, these are the unpleasant things that I have to tolerate: first I have to allow the person to come to my home to see me (whoever, and as many times they want to come) and I have to demonstrate myself in front of them and treat them politely. Then I have to agree to all the formalities and rituals in relation to marriage, and I have to keep quiet about whatever they do for me, spending money, giving gifts, inviting thousands of people, et cetera. They will send me to my new husband's house, as if I belong to that family. I will be completely drawn away from my family. However this person may be, he may not have a permanent job, he may not be good looking, or maybe less qualified, they will try to force me to accept it. If I reject it, they will tell me, "We can't find a bridegroom for you. You are expecting too much, it is our limit, we can't go beyond this, so you have to accept." So whether I like it or not, I have to accept the proposal.

Or shall I keep quiet, not worry about marriage, whether it's going to happen to me or not? If I find a suitable person, then think of it. My opinion is - why should we struggle to get married? If I find somebody to marry,

that's fine. But if I do not marry, I don't want to repent it in the future. I want to take it as it comes. But everybody scares me. After 40 years you will repent it, you will feel lonely, you won't have security, you can't live alone in society, et cetera.

Actually, what I want is to adopt a child once I get a permanent job, look after it and spend the rest of my life with it. I know it is not easy, but my question is can't I do that? Is it so difficult to remain unmarried? So far I have not found any problem in remaining unmarried except for small problems, such as wanting to catch a night train but finding it difficult to get to the railway station because there is no one to take me.

People say if I want to achieve something in my life then I need not marry. But I don't have anything to achieve. I don't have any big ambitions. I would like to live a simple life. I am getting a poor salary, but I am satisfied with that. It is enough for me. So I have to do something and get something more, either from my profession or from marriage.

Sometimes, I wish to marry somebody, in the next moment I hate to think of marriage and decide that I should not marry. I don't know what to do.

**Name withheld on request,
Karnataka**

I feel you are making things difficult for yourself by getting more and more cut off from family, friends and associates while you worry about major, overwhelming questions on marriage, your family, your job, and about what sort of life you want. When people get so isolated they lose confidence in themselves, do less and less to work out their problems, and use up all their strength in worrying.

I suggest that you make a list of

things you have to decide and start working on the more straightforward problems a step at a time. If you have a close friend you might ask her for help; if not, you might consider that your first problem is to find someone who could be a friend. Your isolation seems to add to your confusion about what to do with your life. Slowly you should find more friends at work, and elsewhere with whom you could go out and engage in activities you find interesting.

Start with your more concrete and immediate goals and figure out what actions you need to take to achieve them. For example: you want a permanent job. What would you have to do to get it? As you handle each of your more immediate problems you are likely to gain more confidence in yourself and you will find it less difficult to make up your mind about larger issues such as whether there are any conditions that would make marriage acceptable to you. Maybe if you are happy with other aspects of your life, you might not feel the need for marriage at all. Right now you are too overwhelmed to think through the big issues confronting you. Let yourself have a few months off from worrying about them while you work on building friendships, becoming more active and getting the permanent job you require. Then come back and review things with a less feverish mind.

Even if this approach does not work, please don't lose hope. Perhaps there is a counsellor or a therapist in Mysore who might be of help. Or, often, things just happen to work themselves out without our knowing quite why, and we are puzzled as to why we got so worried.

Keep in touch if you feel Manushi can be of help.

-Editor

== The Male Psyche ==

Obscene comments on a woman do not necessarily reflect her character. On the contrary, they reflect the male psyche. I do not mean that there are no women who have capitalized on their bodily charms and extracted favours from men. However, I would like to pose a very simple question - if a male teacher is attracted towards a female student and gives her more marks, whose weakness does it reveal? Is it not reflective of a man's inherent weakness? This weakness is projected in character assassination of women.

Projection is a term used in psychology to refer to a kind of ego defence mechanism. To further explain this term: we generally do not like to admit our weaknesses, failures or anything unnatural about ourselves. Therefore, we resort to certain ego defence mechanisms which help us in maintaining our mental/emotional balance by reducing internal tensions. We engage in defensive activity to achieve two objectives: the concealment from the self and the prevention of the direct expression of forbidden drives.

For instance, if a student does not perform up to the mark in an examination, he would not like to hold himself responsible. He justifies his performance by saying that the question paper was tough, he did not get sufficient time to study, he was not in good health, and so on. The ego defence mechanism used by the student is known as rationalisation. This

kind of ego defence mechanism is quite healthy and normal as long as it is used in a restricted manner. But its excessive use becomes a sign of mental disorder.

Projection is another ego defence mechanism, defined as the process of invalidly attributing one's own (usually, though not always negative) feelings, motives, thoughts or personal attributes to someone else. Projection is often involved in marital and family problems and it is a salient feature of paranoid behavior. Take, for example, a man who has failed in his love life and has married someone else out of other needs. He is unable to forget his previous lover and fails to develop a normal, spontaneous conjugal relationship with his wife and feels guilty about it. Now he needs to avoid these feared impulses or in-

stincts and the anxiety associated with them. So he subconsciously resorts to projection and accuses his wife of not loving him or of secretly loving someone else. He may even say that she loves her own brothers or father more than her husband.

It is the same mechanism that works at the social psychological level, so assassination of a woman's character is not necessarily an accurate reflection on a woman's character. On the contrary, more often it is the male psyche that is being projected on her.

Basanti Devi, Mysore, Karnataka

== Double Standards ==

In Madras, as in Tamil Nadu itself, the public is film crazy. And, a Rajinikanth starrer gets top billing. *Veera* was no different. I hardly ever watch films these days, but a local women's group was organising an informal, yet serious discussion about the film. I wondered what spurred on such a discussion - considering that the average Madrasi hardly ever reacts to serious issues, at least publicly: still, I went to great lengths to see the film.

This film is like any other *masala* movie, a rags-to-riches story of an aspiring small town singer, who encounters love, opposition and adulation on his way to fame and fortune. *Veera* also portrays some of the "quirks" of life in Indian society: bigamous relationships flourish and are legitimised socially, in



spite of being illegal. The hero Muthu (Rajinikanth) marries the daughter of his patron, when he already loves another woman, and ostensibly “married” her back home. The director has displayed much ingenuity in bringing the first supposedly dead “wife” back to life, bringing the two wives together, etc.

The final scenes were shoddy, ill-conceived and in bad taste. The mother of the hero, so long a silent, yet active supporter, lays down the law, when she says that the two women (wives) must learn to live together, and look after their mutual husband who “sweats and toils for their welfare...” The end is a sort of vindication: it says “To Be Continued...” - meaning, that such bigamous relationships will continue and be encouraged by cinema.

One may ask why a review of such a “nice” Rajini movie is necessary. But there is a subtle, yet noticeable difference: hitherto, custom or familial pressure would have pushed the parties into an unwanted relationship, but *Veera* portrays not one, but three women accepting the situation blithely, without bothering to take any action, save offering a few words about honour, self-respect, etc. And it is precisely because it is a Rajinikanth starrer that the film is being accepted, and bigamy is legitimised, by social acceptance or indifference. As they say, since Rajini (a big star) endorses bigamy (acts the part of a bigamous husband), then there is nothing wrong, if both parties have no objection to it. Meaning that, it

is one’s personal affair, and the law be damned.

The film is a thorough entertainer, with no thought to its impact or feedback. Bigamy seemed to be a means to an end as well as an end in itself. It was sickening to watch both wives simpering and living up to the stereotyped female roles at home - looking pretty, and attending to the needs and wants of their husband. The film also reveals the contrast between the two wives. The first wife is a very traditional, coy and devoted woman from an orthodox Brahmin household, who turns a rebel for marrying her lover; the second wife is a city-bred, well-to-do educated girl, portrayed as someone bold and caring for other

human beings. The scene where she slaps one ruffian who accosts an old man was good, but it is spoilt immediately, for she is portrayed as a weak and defenseless woman when the gangleader hits her back. The message is loud and clear after that. The hero, who watches the scene, comes to her rescue. Behind every woman who takes a bold stand against oppressors, there is one good man who rescues her.

The film depicts contradictory views, reinforces stereotyped gender roles, and attempts to make a show of a “comedy of errors” by the three (un)important women characters, and the main male character.

The important role of the mass-audience medium of cinema cannot be over emphasised. Films are catalysts of social change. Why then do film producers and actors continue displaying such obnoxious and twisted fare, tuned to so-called modern tastes? Is there no room for creativity in seeking new and practically feasible solutions to such important issues as bigamy? In the final analysis, *Veera* reflects the unpalatable truth in our society: that age-old double standards still operate, that gender stereotyped roles and responsibilities are still accepted, that bigamous relationships are encouraged and, above all, that people will continue to remain indifferent and apathetic. In my very own personal opinion, the movie stinks - even and especially if it is a Rajinikanth starrer.

V. Janaki, Madras, TN

