

Married and Unsettled?



Author's Profile

Starting in 1994 with the prestigious Lady Shri Ram College, New Delhi, where the foundations of her studies in psychology were laid, Arpita Lal went on to do an M.Phil. in Clinical Psychology at the world-renowned National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences, Bangalore, and a Ph.D. in Couple and Family Therapy at the Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, USA. With rich clinical experience in both the East and the West, Arpita has also taught in the USA and published in national and international journals. Currently, she works as a Mental Health Therapist in St Clairsville, Ohio, USA.

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Arpita Lal, Ph.D.



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Praise for Married and Unsettled?

“I have read through most of the book, *Married and Unsettled?*, by Dr. Arpita Lal, and I was very impressed by its thoughtfulness about the joys and difficulties of marriage. The language is clear and uncluttered, and it is unmistakably Indian—something very important for the target audience. As an Indian, Arpita Lal speaks from understanding and also from the subtleties and gradations of subjects such as the arranged marriage, which for us in the West are often hard to understand. I think it would be a very useful book for expatriate Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, living in the UK, but more importantly perhaps for people like myself who might find ourselves consulted by people from the sub-continent, and need some guidance.

It seems to me that she has also used her understanding gained from living and working as an Indian in the US. It was lovely to see in the book quotes from Eckhart Tolle. I find this aspect of the movement of influence back and forth between India and the West infinitely fascinating and energising. Tolle has learnt from India and is very Western, and here he is feeding back to India.

The case studies are very helpful; personally I always like them, perhaps because I have always loved stories, but may be also because describing people is much more enlivening than endless theory. Readers can identify with the cases and understand the author’s analyses.”

CATHIE WRIGHT, M.A.

*Core Process Psychotherapist
Manager, CSA Counseling Service
Health in Mind
Edinburgh, UK*

“I have often thought that if we dispel the myth of “happily ever after”, no one would ever consider marriage. In *Married and Unsettled?*, Dr. Arpita Lal describes the many challenges and joys of married life from both perspectives—“universal” and specifically Indian. Her description of marriage is both accurate and hopeful, giving readers the “truth” about the potential of marriage rather than an imaginary view. The vignettes she uses are compelling and the discussion after each provides great insights for not only surviving but thriving as married partners.”

SUZANNE BARTLE-HARING, Ph.D.

Professor of Couple and Family Therapy

The Ohio State University

Columbus, Ohio, USA

“Married and Unsettled?” gives an excellent analysis and understanding of marriages arranged by the couples’ families or by the couple themselves, as also the problems and challenges and how to deal with them. Both parents and the young people can benefit a great deal from this book and learn to choose a life partner who would really suit them. The list of issues that couples in love should discuss about their future together, ranging from career plans to the food they like to eat is exhaustive, and if only they did that, very unromantic though it sounds, their marriage would be a resounding success.

The role that families of origin play—both positive and negative—and how both husband and wife can deal with them are very clearly spelled out. The reality of the Indian situation, wherein the bride is expected to adjust herself to the husband’s family and both husband and wife need to cope with the family’s demands and yet build up their married life, well written. Discussion of the issues arising between the couple, if they are both working, and the way to deal with finances, is important to all couples.

That there would be problems in any marriage and that marriage needs to be worked at, are hard truths that the book brings out well. The information, about the way men and women react differently to problems, dealing with household work and responsibilities, sharing emotions, are all well-delineated. The tips on effective communication of love, on the need to listen to the spouse, on the willingness to bury one’s ego and say sorry when in the wrong, on being ready to forgive—are all excellent suggestions.

The sections on alcoholism and abusive behavior are a necessary part of a marriage guide because many marriages are affected by these issues and couples often do not get adequate information and advice; therefore I am happy they have been included.

Dr. Arpita Lal deserves to be congratulated for putting together a user-friendly and informative book on a very intricate subject. It is a useful guide on many issues connected with marriage among the urban educated middle class in the Indian setting.”

VATSALA SIVASUBRAMANIAN, M.A.

Clinical Psychologist

New Delhi

India

“The complex institution of marriage presented in a surprisingly easy to understand format! Dr. Lal has incredible insight into family structures, relationships and marriage. *Married and Unsettled?* breaks down complex concepts into bite-size digestible readings. The case studies are well chosen and make the material relevant and real to the reader. The analysis of case studies is clinical, and the discussion translates readily into practical utility. A winner in combining pitch, depth and sophistication, hope *Married and Unsettled?* helps you have a happy marriage and a fruitful relationships with your partner.”

DR. RAJU LAKSHMANA, MD, FRANZCP

Psychiatrist

Clinical Director, North East Area Mental Health Service (NEAMHS)

Senior Fellow, Department of Psychiatry and Centre for International

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Preface

Indian families have undergone a radical transformation over the last few decades. A variety of factors have contributed substantially to this. For example, modernization (read westernization) at an unprecedented pace, geographic and upward social mobility, the growing number of women in the workforce, changing gender roles, and greater freedom and opportunity for the sexes to mingle have dismantled the structure of Indian society. Individuals and families are struggling to come to terms with these changes. Many feel lonely and isolated because they feel embarrassed to break the image of their 'picture perfect family' in the eyes of others by talking about their struggles. As a result, they do not realize that they are not the only ones struggling with these issues and that there are many others in similar situations. There is stigma attached to seeking external help for marital and family problems. People feel that it is best to resolve such issues within the family instead of divulging family secrets to counselors. This book is an attempt to fill the void that exists in the literature on marital and family issues written for Indians, by Indians, about Indians. Hopefully, readers will be able to relate personally to aspects of this book and realize that they are not the only ones bewildered by changes in family forms and functioning. They may also find in the book some hints for resolving their problems. I also hope that couples and families will be encouraged to seek counseling for issues they are unable to resolve on their own. Life is short and it is not worth spending it in needless conflicts with those we love and live with. If anger and prejudice have made it difficult to look beyond our view of the situation there is no harm in approaching a neutral, well-meaning and trained

professional such as a counselor who can help us do that. God loves us all and works through His instruments. Let the counselor be that instrument, if necessary.

I am grateful to my clients who have shared their lives with me. It is because of them that I have been able to write this book. Although their names and the details have been changed to preserve their privacy, each one of them has earned my profound gratitude and respect.

I shall be happy to receive suggestions from readers for improving the next edition. The suggestions may be e-mailed to me on arpitalal@gmail.com.

ARPITA LAL



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Saying 'Thank you' is the least I can do for the big role many have played in making this book a reality. Those to whom I wish to express immense gratitude include:

Mr R. Chandra Sekhar, Executive Publisher, Tata McGraw-Hill Education, who shared with me the idea of the book, and gave excellent suggestions for improving the first draft,

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My friend, Viba Pavan Kumar, for her professional expertise, generous gift of time in going through the entire manuscript and invaluable suggestions and support throughout,

My friends, Anusha Suryanarayan and Jyoti Gupta, for sharing their personal experiences and wonderful ideas to help enhance the content of this book,

My parents, Ramesh and Lovleen Bijlani, for always believing in me, and for being a source of strength and inspiration throughout this endeavor,

My husband, Manish Kamal, for teaching me the language of love, cementing my faith in marriage, and encouraging me at every step of the way, without which I would not have been able to write this book,

And many more whom I have inadvertently missed mentioning by name.

ARPITA LAL



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Getting Married

Happy marriages begin when we marry the ones we love, and they blossom when we love the ones we marry.

Tom Mullen

Marriage is considered to be one of the happiest and most joyous occasions in our lives. In our society it is also often viewed as a solution to many problems. Parents feel that an irresponsible person will automatically become responsible if he/she is married off. They also believe that marriage will bring health and happiness to someone who is depressed or not in good health. The romanticized view of the transition may actually add to its difficulty, since everyone wants to focus on the happiness associated with the shift. What one often fails to realize is that marriage is itself a stressful event in the lives of the people getting married. It may bring 'good' stress, eustress or distress depending on whether the person wants to get married or not. But even under the best of circumstances it calls for a lot of readjustment and renegotiation. Decisions can no longer be made independently and even simple, everyday decisions such as what one eats, when one sleeps, or how one spends ones time and money are no longer entirely ones own. The partners also need to redefine their relationships with parents, siblings, extended family members, friends and colleagues. A family too may not find it easy to open its doors to a new member. Along with a sense of being settled, marriage also involves a lot of unsettling challenges and expressions such as 'finally married and settled' are therefore more an indication of wishful thinking than reality.



Planning and Preparation

Much of what happens before the marriage determines what happens after. How the partners were brought together—whether they discovered each other on their own or their parents did most of the homework to make the marriage possible—may determine the kind of challenges the marriage brings. Therefore, let us first discuss some highlights of the different types of marriages common in India and in other countries with a similar culture.

Arranged Marriage

In a way, all marriages are arranged; the only question is, by whom. The most common form of marriage in India is the parent-arranged marriage and that is what arranged marriage generally means. In such a marriage the parents take most of the responsibility for finding an appropriate match for their child. They generally consider factors such as the family background, caste, community and socio-economic status of the prospective bride or groom. Education, professional success and future prospects are considerations that would influence the choice, particularly of the groom. On the other hand, physical appearance and chastity are particularly important considerations in choosing the bride. In an arranged marriage the union of two families and kinships is considered as important as the union of two individuals.

There was a time when, in an arranged marriage the bride and groom did not even see each other before their wedding day. That has changed with modernization and technology. Now, marriage bureaus that have mushroomed all over the country help to arrange marriages instead of extended family and priests. Depending on how much one is prepared to spend, they will create an advertisement for the prospective bride or groom and post it online, scrutinize the resumes they receive, forward these for approval, arrange a meeting of the families and also conduct a background check of the proposed family, if desired. Parents or prospective brides and grooms may also choose to post their profile on matrimonial websites in order to find a suitable partner. The definition of an arranged marriage has

thus become more fluid. The prospective couple may e-mail each other, call and meet several times before making up their minds. Thus, while the parents may make the initial search and selection, the prospective bride and groom would have acquired a sort of casting vote. The parents are also quite happy to escape the responsibility for the final decision lest they be blamed if the marriage does not work. The couple is thus able to assert their independence while keeping the parents involved. If parents try to play more than a facilitating role they may sometimes alienate their children, make them miserable or turn them off getting married. In order to avoid this, parents and other elders have become quite flexible in their approach.

Challenges and Overcoming Them

Now let us look at the challenges that are unique to arranged marriages. The process of selecting a mate is very tedious and time-consuming. To start with, parents collect information on the background of the candidates, and get their photographs and horoscopes. Then the candidates who do not satisfy the criteria considered important by the family are eliminated. Even factors such as a divorce within the family or a sibling's marriage outside the caste or community may create a bias against the prospective bride or groom. However, if no candidate seems completely satisfactory the search may be intensified. Parents may also prepare themselves mentally for a little 'compromise'. Next, the parents may contact the families of a few chosen candidates and then starts the process of fine elimination. Initially, only the families may meet and if everything seems satisfactory to both parties the prospective partners are allowed to meet each other. However, this is now becoming more flexible and the prospective partners may be able to meet or communicate with each other until they feel that they are ready to take a final decision. The boundaries set around this, however, vary from family to family. Having described the process objectively, it is important not to overlook the emotions involved. If a prospective bride or groom is repeatedly rejected it may lead to feelings of worthlessness, depression and shame. This can adversely affect a person's self-esteem and self-confidence. In the case of prospective brides it may also lead to feelings of guilt. They may feel that they are a burden on their parents and ultimately settle for a match that

does not meet their expectations. In some cases the prospective brides and grooms may feel like commodities at the mercy of potential customers. The process may also cause misunderstandings and unpleasantness within the family.

Case Study

Himani's parents were very concerned about her because she was 26 years old and still single. For the past few years they had been circulating her biodata in the hope of finding an eligible mate for her. Several families did respond and Himani had met several prospective grooms. But in every case there was some hurdle. The prospective groom's family found a problem either with her height, complexion, eyesight, education or her parents' ability to pay the 'right' dowry. By now Himani's self-esteem had hit rock bottom and she was not interested in seeing any more boys, at least for some time. The unsolicited advice from relatives, neighbors and family friends did not help.

Discussion

Since repeated failures in the selection test can adversely affect a person's self-esteem and self-confidence, it is important that Himani's family handle the situation with adequate sensitivity and sees it from her point of view. This may make the process more humane and prevent her from feeling like a commodity.

The prospective bride or groom's view of marriage can also make a difference. If the intention is to complete one's self and add to one's self-esteem, repeated rejections are more likely to breakdown the person's self-confidence. On the other hand, if the person views himself or herself as complete and considers marriage as the formation of an intimate relationship with another complete individual, he/she is likely to retain a higher level of self-confidence irrespective of whether others approve of him or her, or not. What the person and the parents have to realize is firstly, that 'staying unmarried' is not something that happens only to others, and secondly, 'not getting married' is not the greatest tragedy in life: going through a bad marriage is much worse.

Case Study

Reema was 28 years old and was pursuing her doctorate in biochemistry. She had recently broken up with her boyfriend of 4 years because he was cheating on her. The breakup had left her completely devastated. It had been a struggle to make it through each day in the beginning. Her parents were pressurizing her to have an arranged marriage. Reema needed time to heal before she felt ready to move on. Parental pressure was more as she had a younger sister who was 25 years old and they wanted Reema to be married before her. Reema felt responsible for delaying her sister's marriage and reluctantly agreed to meet some prospective grooms that her parents suggested. During these meetings she was distracted and her thoughts wandered off to the times with her ex-boyfriend. She compared the prospective grooms to him and found that none of them came up to her expectations. She did not know what to do. She needed more time but did not want to disappoint her parents and sister.

Discussion

What should Reema do in this situation? She feels that she is not ready to get married but at the same time does not want to disappoint her parents and sister. It may help to discuss what is on her mind and her inner feelings with them. This may make her parents understand her conflict better. They would also realize that she understands their point of view and cares for them but cannot help it. If she is driven by this guilt to get married to someone she does not like she may be unhappy for the rest of her life. While her getting married quickly may please her parents for the present, they would not be happy if their daughter is unhappy in the future. She can urge her parents to give her more time while they look for a groom for her sister. Although it may be unusual and unconventional for the younger sister to get married first, it can happen, and there is nothing immoral about it. This attitude can ease some pressure and give Reema the time she needs while reducing her feelings of guilt.

A factor that further complicates the selection process in arranged marriages is the dowry system. This adds a new dimension of competitiveness and commercialism to the marriage market. In communities where the dowry system is prevalent there is a widespread unwritten understanding

about the amount that may be considered 'proper' as dowry for a boy with a particular family background, level of education and earning potential. The inability of the prospective bride's parents to meet these 'legitimate' expectations automatically eliminates her from the pool of eligibles. This can really hurt the feelings of an otherwise accomplished girl and her parents. The dowry system has implications for girls from the time they are born. The anticipation that they will have to pay dowry at the time of her marriage makes many parents mourn the birth of a girl child. As the girl grows she often feels like a burden on her parents. They start saving for her wedding while she is still a child. Her upbringing is geared towards molding her into becoming a giving, loving and caring individual. Efforts are made to teach her all the skills she will need as a homemaker, such as cooking, stitching and knitting. In short, she would be quite justified in concluding that she is born to marry and please her husband and in-laws. She may be physically, emotionally and verbally abused and tortured by her husband and his family if they are not satisfied with the dowry she brought. Greed may impel them to make constant demands for dowry even after the marriage. In many unfortunate cases this may lead to the death of the bride (either through murder or suicide). The dowry system also has other implications. Dowry sometimes acts as a balancing factor. The groom's family might approve a girl even if she is not good-looking if her parent's are willing to give a hefty dowry. This practice in turn, leads to some ugly prejudices. If an enlightened groom and his family try to change the system and refuse dowry in a community where the dowry system is almost universal, it may lead to the suspicion that there is something wrong with the groom. On the other hand, if the bride's family is willing to pay an exorbitant dowry, the groom's family may suspect that there may be something wrong with the bride that her family is trying to conceal.

Case Study

Saloni had been married to Hemant for a month. At the engagement, Hemant's parents were rather vague about the dowry they wanted. They wanted the wedding function to be elaborate enough to do justice to the status of the two families, the baraat (the groom's party) to be well fed and the rest was optional.

Saloni's parents could give her whatever gifts they liked; they knew best what Saloni was used to and whatever they gave would add to her comforts. There was a period of four months between the engagement and the wedding. After the engagement the demands for dowry by the groom's family became more specific. They wanted gold, cash and certain home appliances. Saloni's parents somehow tried to meet all the demands, as they did not want Hemant's parents to call off the engagement. They also wanted to ensure that their daughter would be treated well after marriage. But the expectations of Hemant's family were insatiable. During the wedding ceremony they tried to humiliate Saloni's family by finding fault with the function. The humiliation did not end with the wedding ceremony. After the wedding, Hemant and his family started taunting Saloni. They would criticize her parents, call them misers, bankrupt, paupers, beggars, promise-breakers, etc. and point out how they had cut corners at the wedding function, in the ornaments and appliances they had given, and so on. They would also intersperse their taunts with new demands. Hemant was in business and he would tell Saloni that if he had more money to invest, he could earn a lot more. These conversations were obviously made with an expectation that Saloni's parents would provide that money. When the money did not arrive Hemant became more vociferous in his demand, started shouting and threatening Saloni and finally stooped to hitting her.

Discussion

Greed and conditioning by the norms of the conventional society in which they live have made Hemant and his parents unscrupulous. They see little wrong with using thinly-veiled strategies to extract more from Saloni's parents.

Saloni's parents may find Hemant and his parent's behavior wrong and inconvenient, but perhaps being conditioned by the same conventional society they too do not find it totally unacceptable. Hence, they have put up with it under the illusion that it is all for the sake of Saloni's happiness. However, Saloni is not happy and the taunts and jibes to which she is subjected are only part of the reason. She is also unhappy because she feels sorry for her parents. She knows how difficult it has been for her father, the only earning member of the family, to bring up three daughters, educate them and get

two of them married; the youngest is yet to be married. Her father will retire in three years and he also has to think of a reserve for his old age. Saloni feels she and her parents have been trapped by the marriage.

On the basis of Hemant's parents' behavior during the period between the engagement and marriage, this was only to be expected. Further, we convey more through what we do not say than through what we do. Saloni and her parents should have judged Hemant and his parents not only by what they said before and after the engagement, but also upon their intuitive perception. It is often possible to know whether a person really means what he says; whether the words spoken are consistent with the type of person he is. But we often go primarily by the spoken words because we do not trust our intuition enough, and sometimes also because we do not want to believe our intuition. It is risky to reach the stage of marriage purely on wishful thinking because marriage is a crucial juncture. Getting out of a bad marriage is a thousand times more difficult than saying 'no' before marriage.

What if the marriage has already taken place, as in this case? Again, the sooner one realizes the trap one has walked into the better. The trend so far in the case is enough to conclude that the demands are not going to end anytime soon. The demands will keep escalating and the torture Saloni will be subjected to will also get worse. It is better to wake up before Saloni has a child or worse still, is killed or commits suicide. Conventional ideas of family honour, which compel the girl to stay with her husband at all costs, are very unfair to women. After getting Saloni out of the hostile environment she and her parents should work towards dissolving the marriage. Fortunately, the law is tilted in favour of women and compensates to some extent for the greater embarrassment they suffer socially when a marriage turns sour. Divorce is not the greatest tragedy in life; persisting with an irreparably bad marriage is worse.

As they say, every little drop adds up to form the ocean. If you are a parent or a prospective bride or groom, make your voice heard. Change for the better could well begin with you. It is important for individuals to stand up against the dowry system by refusing to give or take dowry. Parents need to remove their daughter from the scene of abuse and provide her with love and support if she is being tortured and abused because of inadequate

dowry. She needs to feel that she has a right to her parental home just like her brothers. It is also important for parents to educate their daughters. This will help young women to be economically independent. If she has a career she can support herself and her parents need not support her through dowry, after marriage.

Much though we may like to shut our eyes to it, the caste system emerges as an undeniable factor in an arranged marriage. We may claim to be open-minded, modern and liberal but even in the twenty-first century many people in our country are still vehemently against marrying or letting their child marry someone from a lower caste. They feel that the adulteration will destroy the purity that has been passed down from generation to generation in their family. The present form of the caste system is a national shame that can never be erased unless we start ignoring it while arranging marriages.

Another set of challenges that an arranged marriage may bring is in cases where the interval between the engagement and the marriage is unduly long. The question then arises as to how much contact is permissible between the partners? When does an engagement become too long? Issues that can further complicate matters in such situations are things like distance. What if the boy is working in the US and the girl is studying in India?

Case Study

Preeti and Kunal's parents arranged their marriage. Preeti is pursuing her Masters in Economics from a university in India and Kunal is a software engineer and works for an MNC in the US. During one of Kunal's visits to India his parents introduced him to Preeti. Preeti and Kunal liked each other and agreed to get married. Before Kunal returned to the US they had a simple engagement ceremony to which only close family and friends were invited. They have been engaged for almost 2 years. Preeti is waiting to complete her Masters while Kunal is waiting to sort out his immigration status so that he can get married and take Preeti with him to the US. In the meantime however, they are both growing tired of the long distance relationship. They have started to have frequent arguments over trivial issues on the phone and to question whether they are really right for each other. They are afraid to talk to their parents about this because they know that they will urge them to stay committed.

Discussion

There is typically a gender difference in the way a young person behaves while moving from the fluidity of the pre-marital relationship towards the finality of the married state. The difference comes to the fore in case of long engagements, as in the case of Preeti and Kunal. The girl starts feeling insecure and gets impatient. She wants to tie the knot and feel secure. But the boy is generally not in a hurry. He wants to be fully equipped to provide for and protect his wife before taking on responsibility. In short, the girl wants to get married to feel secure whereas the boy wants to be secure before getting married. It is possibly because of this gender difference that in Preeti and Kunal's case many of the things that couples may be able to take in their stride after they are married are creating roadblocks for them before the wedding. Both Preeti and Kunal may imagine that if they are with another partner they may not have these problems. But the truth is that no matter whom a person is married to, there will always be innumerable issues that will need to be worked on. What often changes after marriage is only the couple's level of commitment to the relationship and that is what pressurizes them to work things out. Also, the cost of not working it out may far outweigh the cost of working it out once the couple is married. The long distance aspect of the relationship further complicates the situation for Preeti and Kunal. What we learn from this case is the importance of talking about the logistics of when the couple could possibly get married before rushing into an engagement. It is important for both sides to be straightforward about career aspirations and immigration issues (for those who reside abroad) among other things, instead of keeping the other party in the dark or indulging in vague and totally unrealistic optimism.

Gender differences give rise to another set of challenges. As men launch out of their families of origin, their career becomes all important for them. On the other hand, for women there is often a clash between family and social pressures to get married, and her career demands. The more a woman focuses on her career the less viable are her marital options. For men, an increase in the level of education increases their chances of marriage, whereas for women, an increase in their level of education beyond a point actually reduces their chances of marriage. This adds to the pressure that women face to get married at the 'right' time.

Hopefully, as our society makes further progress a higher level of education will not lower a woman's chances of marriage. Women's education is directly related to their ability to become economically independent. Economic independence for women is crucial for their self-esteem and security in the face of abuse, divorce and old age.

Love Marriage/Self-arranged Marriage

Unlike parent-arranged marriages in which partners hope to fall in love with each other after getting married, in self-arranged marriages, more popularly known as love marriages, individuals choose their own partners and love blossoms before marriage. A few decades ago love marriages were very rare in India and were looked down upon. But with an increase in women's level of education, their financial independence and increase in the age at which people get married, it is quite common for people to stumble upon their own mates. With the declining popularity of the traditional joint family system and increasing expectations that people have from marriage, love marriages have not only become more common but also more acceptable. Although this trend is still largely restricted to the cities, it is spreading fast to the villages.

In the last few decades various hybrids of arranged and love marriage have also become popular. In such marriages the parents may narrow down the pool of eligibles and pass on a list of prospective brides or grooms to their children. After the initial introductions by parents, the children may have the freedom to independently contact the prospective bride or groom, meet them without parental supervision and take a few months to decide if they would like to get married. This phase may quite closely resemble the dating phase of a love relationship. Alternatively, the children might find their mate entirely on their own keeping in mind their parents' preferences. Online matrimonial sites often facilitate this process.

Challenges and Overcoming Them

Being in love before marriage has its own challenges. The biggest challenge is choosing the right mate for the right reasons. This is indeed a heavy responsibility for young shoulders to carry.

It is very important that individuals choosing their own mates give themselves adequate time to get to know the other person. Even though love at first sight seems to work for some, a closer look invariably reveals a lot of hard follow-up work that has gone into making the marriage a success. Everyone puts their best foot forward in the beginning of a relationship. It is only with time that one discovers the idiosyncrasies and quirks of an individual. Besides spending time getting to know the partner, it is also important to know the right questions to ask. Crucial issues often get overlooked because the couple may have observed each other a lot in college or in the office, in restaurants and theatres, but not in real life situations. Some of the important issues to consider during the courtship period have been listed in the Box.

Crucial Issues for Discussion During the Courtship Period

Money: priorities in terms of spending on

- ☞ Assets, e.g. house, car, furniture, appliances and clothes
- ☞ Food
- ☞ Services to save time or to add to comfort, e.g. domestic help
- ☞ Travel
- ☞ Gifts
- ☞ Charity
- ☞ Discretionary spending
- ☞ Savings—preferences: property, shares, gold or fixed deposits

Family structure: joint or nuclear?

- ☞ Views and preference
- ☞ Overall choice in terms of circumstances of the couple

Will the wife work? If yes,

- ☞ Only before having children
- ☞ After having children also

Lifestyle

- ☞ Food preferences, e.g. healthy vs. fast food, freshly cooked vs. refrigerated food
- ☞ Meal timings
- ☞ Sleeping habits, e.g. going to bed early or late, on working days vs. weekends

- ☞ Physical activities: if yes, timings and preferences (e.g. walking, jogging, sports, swimming, gym, yogasanas; alone or with friends)
- ☞ Driving
- ☞ Smoking
- ☞ Drinking: if yes, quantity, frequency; only in company or also alone
- ☞ Division of labour with respect to, for example:
 - a. Cooking
 - b. Cleaning
 - c. Domestic help: full-time or part-time, will cooking also be left to her/him?
 - d. Infant care
 - e. Childcare: feeding, getting ready for school, teaching, errands, etc.
- ☞ Balance between home and work
- ☞ Leisure time activities
- ☞ Socializing: how much and relative time spent with:
 - a. Each other's family
 - b. Other close and distant relatives
 - c. Friends
- ☞ Volunteering for socially useful work

Attitude to religion and spirituality

- ☞ Views
- ☞ Observance of rituals and ceremonies
- ☞ Joining an organized group, degree of participation in activities of the group

Goals

- ☞ Short term priorities: e.g. money, career or children
- ☞ Long term priorities: e.g. worldly success (in terms of wealth, position, power, prestige, etc.) or peace of mind

The list is not exhaustive and it is not necessary to exhaust the list during courtship. But it is suggestive of the type of questions to consider. Moreover, it is unlikely that any two persons would be in total agreement on all such questions. One should try to see how dominant or submissive a person the partner is and which are the issues on which he/she is most likely to put his/her foot down. One should then ask, would I be comfortable leaving these

decisions to her/him? Having considered these questions the most crucial question is whether one is still ready to accept the person as he/she is. The biggest mistake is to expect that somehow the person will change or can be changed after marriage. Many argue that if their partner loves them enough they will be willing to change for their sake. This hope is seldom realized. The first rule to remember is that the only person you can bank upon to change is yourself. If you can accept your partner the way he or she is, and are willing to change yourself, you may go ahead with the relationship. Actually, one should be prepared to discover many more annoying things about the partner only after marriage. Even in a love marriage, no matter how long the courtship the partners seldom know each other the way they would after marriage.

It is also important to get married for the right reasons. Marriages based on positive motives have a higher chance of success. Some positive reasons for getting married could be companionship, to find love and intimacy, to aid mutual growth and to share the experience of parenthood. Marrying for the wrong reasons could lead to pain and misery for both the individuals involved. Some negative reasons for getting married could be marrying on the rebound from another relationship, for economic security, to rebel against one's parents, to seek independence from parents, to fill a vacuum in one's life or make oneself complete, to put an end to parental pressure, or to increase one's self-esteem, bank balance or standing in society.

Marriages between certain types of individuals have a very high probability of success. It helps if both individuals are independent and mature. This can make it easier for them to develop an interdependent relationship that facilitates intimacy. It is important for the individuals to love not only each other but also themselves. It is also important to feel secure and self-confident before we can truly give of ourselves. The individuals must know themselves well. They should be aware of their strengths and weaknesses and not blame others for their weaknesses. They should also be considerate towards the weaknesses of others. The partners should be able to enjoy being alone as well as being together. It is important to be able to enjoy separate activities and time apart in order to appreciate the time spent together. The individuals should be able to express themselves openly and clearly as well as resolve

conflicts that arise between them. It is a myth that a conflict-free relationship is a happy relationship. If two people share their lives with each other they are bound to disagree on at least a few things and have conflicts. Therefore one should strive towards a relationship in which conflicts can be resolved successfully.

Since love marriages are self-arranged it is likely that the partners may come from very diverse backgrounds. Their families may differ in caste, community, religion and language, and may be very poorly matched in terms of their socio-economic or educational status. This diversity can bring a lot of richness to the relationship but it also brings a lot of challenges. If parents consider these differences to be beyond the limits of their tolerance, they oppose the alliance even if they are not otherwise vehemently against self-arranged marriages.

It is very important for the couple to talk about these differences and how they will affect their relationship and marriage. It is also important to get a feel of how your partner would like to negotiate the differences in, for example, religion, finances, customs, traditions, food and language. What if one partner is a Hindu and the other is a Christian? Is each partner comfortable with the other continuing to follow his or her own religious practices? How would they like to raise their children? Will the children be exposed to both the religions while growing up? Would they leave the choice of religion to the children? What if one partner is vegetarian and the other is non-vegetarian? Will the vegetarian partner be comfortable if non-vegetarian food is cooked at home? Some couples may find that they are able to negotiate the differences, rise above them and give greater priority to the relationship. Others may find that it is difficult for them to do that and they may see these differences as potential sources of conflicts after marriage. In that case, it may be better to end the relationship instead of expecting the other person to change or hope for things to somehow work out after marriage. It is also important to discuss your values, beliefs, and expectations from the other person and the relationship in order to find out if they are compatible. It is wise to involve the families on both sides only after the couple is sure that they would like to get married. If you expect opposition

from the parents, you need to be prepared with reasons to convince your parents (and be convinced yourself) that your choice of the partner is right.

Case Study

Vipin and Deepa met each other in Mumbai while studying in college. They dated each other for about three years and were sure there were no major issues between them. They had both been born and brought up in Mumbai. Even their families were at comparable socio-economic levels. However, their mother tongues were different, which did invite some parental opposition, but eventually the families agreed to their marriage. Soon after marriage their jobs took them to Bangalore and they settled down as a nuclear family. With nobody to interfere with their day-to-day life one might assume that the couple lived happily ever after. But that was not to be. Soon they discovered so many differences between them, which they had hardly touched upon or anticipated in the course of the innumerable lengthy conversations they had had before marriage. Vinay and Deepa had different standards when it came to organization of stuff in the house. For Vinay, everything had to be at its place and there was a place assigned to everything. Deepa, on the other hand, could put up with a lot of disorder. The result was that Vinay was left alone sorting out messy corners, chairs on which clothes had piled up, tables on which papers had piled up. Not only that, when he tried to sort out Deepa's messy wardrobe she was annoyed with him for making her feel inadequate. After that he decided to keep his eyes closed to her areas and bothered only about his. The division was not without its emotional repercussions—every time he decided to ignore some mess because it was her stuff, he also felt a wave of suppressed anger against her. When it came to food, before marriage they had eaten together only in restaurants and both were concerned with eating what tastes good. Further, as a chivalrous male, Vinay had left the choice to Deepa and was happy because she enjoyed the food and he enjoyed her company. Now that they were married, what they ate at home was determined by the choices they made when they shopped for food. When they went shopping he would concentrate on fruits and vegetables while she would be more interested in meat and chicken—the result was that they would be pulling each other in opposite directions. After a vegetable had been cooked, Vinay would like to finish it within two days,

whereas Deepa would try to stretch it to at least three—she felt big helpings of vegetable were not necessary and the longer the vegetable lasted, the less often she would have to cook. Their attitude to money was also quite different. When they went shopping Vinay would like to buy the best available vegetables whereas Deepa would like to buy the second best to save some money. But while she saved a few rupees by such economy, she had no hesitation in spending hundreds and thousands on clothes, which only added to her already messy and overflowing wardrobe. Vinay could not tolerate the paradox. He wanted to save by curtailing superfluous spending and invest the savings in fixed deposits in the bank. Deepa wanted to use their savings for buying shares or property because she thought the appreciation would bring much better returns. Vinay was not interested in speculative investments. They also had differences with respect to socializing. Deepa had a cousin in Bangalore and she would show an inclination to meet them every weekend. Vinay found there was not much in common between them and the cousin. He did not feel that being related was enough reason to spend that much time together in meaningless family gossip. Vinay wanted to develop a small group of carefully selected friends and spend quality time with them. That needed some trial and error, for which there was no time if their weekends were spent with the cousin's family. Deepa talked to her family in Mumbai on the phone everyday; sometimes more than once a day. During these conversations she would communicate her differences with Vinay to her parents. They generally supported her, partly because she was their daughter and partly because the way Deepa wanted to live was similar to the way they lived—after all, it was from them that she had learnt how to live. They tried to advise her on how she could have her way with Vinay. Even the little that Vinay got to know of these conversations was enough to tell him all. He was very angry at the way his in-laws were 'interfering' with their life in spite of the distance. To Deepa, the anger was totally unwarranted. The end result of it all was that within two years their life was hell. They were always sitting atop a chain of volcanoes and one never knew which of them would explode. They were not sure how long their marriage would last and had therefore given up, for the time being, the idea of having any children.

Discussion

Deepa saw all her differences with Vinay arising out of his superiority complex. She thought that he not only had a giant-sized male ego but he also thought that he was more intelligent. Vinay had done much better than Deepa in college and she thought that had given him a superiority complex. On the other hand, she thought that just because he did better in college it did not mean that he also knew better how to live.

It is true that Vinay felt superior to Deepa but he did not think it was a superiority complex. He regretted that so many differences had been overlooked during the long courtship that they had. He could not understand how he had wasted all the time on sweet nothings instead of trying to know Deepa better.

It has been said, love is poetry whereas marriage is prose. The superficial attraction of the company of the opposite sex can be so overwhelming that the couples generally discover each other only after marriage. However, in order to get some idea of potential problems it is better to ask each other some basic questions about real life issues and each partner should answer them honestly. These questions should also be a part of the conversations during the courtship and if the couple feels that their romance was an infatuation, it is better to call it off—it is much easier to do that before marriage. Some idea of what the partner will be like as a husband or wife may be had by visiting the partner's house a few times before marriage, sometimes without giving them much time to prepare for the visit. One should try to observe how neat and organized the house is, how much junk they have accumulated, what type of food they normally eat, how the partner's parents interact with each other, and how the partner interacts with his or her parents and siblings. In short, it is very helpful to observe the partner in a real life situation. That is what Vinay and Deepa had not done. They had observed each other only in college and in restaurants and theatres.

Case Study

When Ajay and Sujata met each other for the first time and felt attracted by the similarity in their short-term and long-term goals in life, they felt they were made for each other. Knowing more about each other over the next one

year only strengthened their resolve to get married. Then Sujata started having pain in the left leg. Initially, even the doctors dismissed it as something minor. But the pain, instead of going away started to increase. Further, the site of the pain started swelling and became red. An x-ray of the leg suggested a bone tumor. Ajay started spending more and more time with Sujata, not in restaurants but in hospitals. As the seriousness of the illness became apparent, Sujata told Ajay to forget about her. But Ajay said that he was happy to take care of her, no matter what it took. The doctors told them that an operation was essential. Only when the tumor was seen at the operation would it be known how extensive the operation would be. When the leg was operated upon, their worst fears came true. It was a malignant tumor and the leg had to be amputated. Sujata once again pleaded with Ajay not to spoil his life with her. But Ajay persisted with his resolve to stand by her through everything. He had fallen in love with Sujata, the person, and she was still the same person—a physical abnormality made no difference to that basic reality. Much against the advice of his parents and many well-wishers Ajay got married to Sujata. Their life is neither easy nor 'normal', but it is happy. Both of them have had to make a lot of adjustment in terms of organization of the house, their outdoor activities, and their interactions with family and friends. Sujata is grateful to Ajay and she is grateful to God for bringing Ajay into her life. But Ajay does not try to show in any way that he has done Sujata a favor. It is not certain how long Sujata will live but they are trying to make the most of whatever period is available by living a life full of love, productivity and goodwill.

Discussion

This case study shows that happiness depends not on events and circumstances but on our attitude to them. It also brings out a few other perennial principles. First, love should be based on factors deeper than the body. Beauty and physical normalcy are more vulnerable than the deeper qualities of the person. Secondly, love does not remember what it gives, because love is meaningless without giving. That is why, although Sujata feels grateful to Ajay, he does not expect any concessions under the impression that he has done Sujata a favor. Finally, a life spent in self-absorption is never happy. In spite of a major problem in their life, Ajay and Sujata's life does not revolve around the problem. They have chosen a life in which there is a place for thinking

of others and of helping others. That is what makes life meaningful and also happy.

Many Indian parents are against the very idea of self-arranged marriages. Even though the child has grown up, parents may have a hard time treating their child like an adult. They may consider the child highly intelligent and successful but too immature for making such a crucial decision independently (and parents are not always wrong!). Therefore getting the approval of parents can prove to be difficult. Although the children know that they have the right to choose their partner, they would much rather have the cake and eat it too: marry whom they like without annoying their parents. The phase between telling the parents about the relationship and the parents coming round (which they generally do eventually) can be a rollercoaster ride for everyone involved. It may involve many heated arguments and discussions with parents and with the partner. This is often the first time that many children become conscious of the bond that makes them care for their parents' approval. An unseen umbilical cord continues to tie the children to their parents. No matter how keen the children are to construct a new future, it is painful and almost impossible, to wipe out the past. The children also often realize that the expectations that parents have of them are closely linked to whom they get married to. Often marrying someone of your choice rather than your parents' choice may be perceived as letting the parents down. This may lead to a lot of introspection and an exponential growth in maturity for some. It may also lead to a redefining of the relationship that the children have with their parents and in many cases when the parents accept the relationship without much opposition, the children may actually get closer to the parents. The parents' acceptance of their choice may reveal to the child the unconditional nature of parental love. However, in many cases, the end result may not be so pleasant. Either the child may yield and break off the relationship solely due to parental pressure or get married against the parents' wishes. In either case, the parent-child relationship may be badly bruised and they may never completely recover from the trauma.

Interestingly, what often drives the parents' disapproval of a self-arranged marriage is societal pressure rather than their own convictions. Indian society is a collectivistic society, which means that it gives greater importance to the

interdependence in human relationships than to individuality. The people around us remarkably influence our behaviors and decisions. Parents are often concerned about what the extended family, neighbors, friends and colleagues might say if they find out that their child is opting for a self-arranged marriage. Some parents fear that society would infer that their child has a loose character or that they did not adequately discipline their children. Parents may also be concerned that the love marriage of one child might spoil the reputation of the family so that it would be difficult for them to find partners through arranged marriages for their other children.

Even if parents are opposed to their child marrying someone, the approach that the child takes while talking to them about it may play a crucial role in how things unfold. It is important to understand the attitude of parents rather than dismiss them as obsolete antiques. They were raised in a different era when it was uncommon for people to choose their own mate. We all take time to get accustomed to something that we are not familiar with and initially we tend to resist it, and in order to rationalize the resistance we find faults with it. In such a situation it is very difficult not to take parental opposition personally. But it may help if youngsters as well as parents try to understand each other's viewpoints. Times are changing and the younger generation today has more opportunities and freedom to mingle with the opposite sex. It is also better equipped to take crucial life decisions independently. The willingness and ability to look at the situation from the other person's perspective will likely lead to a more healthy dialogue between parent and child.

Planning the wedding can also be a challenge, especially if both the partners come from families with very different customs and traditions. In that case, finding a middle ground and incorporating some traditions of both the families in such a way that everyone is satisfied can be a difficult task. The process is facilitated if at least one of the families is indifferent to the ceremonies and customs, and treats them as frills that are irrelevant to the central purpose of uniting two souls.

Case Study

Rahul's parents had introduced him to many prospective brides and now the time had come for him to make up his mind about whom he wanted to marry. Rahul was a little confused about what he wanted to do. He had feelings for a colleague at work called Aditi. She too seemed to like Rahul but they had not expressed their feelings for each other. They were good friends and often went out for dinner or a movie after work. Aditi was from a different community and Rahul was quite sure that his parents would be opposed to his getting married to her. Rahul reluctantly agreed to get married to one of the girls introduced to him by his parents. Her name was Shruti. Soon Rahul and Shruti were engaged. It was only after he was engaged that Rahul realized he had made a mistake. His feelings for Aditi intensified and through a common friend he discovered that Aditi was really sad after his engagement and that she too had special feelings for him. Rahul felt torn between what his parents wanted him to do and what he wanted to do. He did not want to let his parents down. He knew that they would be concerned about the shame that breaking the engagement would bring to the family. They would also disapprove of Aditi since she had a different background. Finally Rahul mustered the courage to talk to his parents about the issue. Initially they dismissed what he wanted as something completely impossible but many lengthy discussions later, they agreed to let him have his way. Rahul's engagement to Shruti was called off and he married Aditi.

Discussion

It is quite clear that Rahul was uneasy for long before he picked up the courage to do the right thing. First, he never talked about his relationship with Aditi to his parents, assuming that they would not agree because of some differences in their backgrounds. Secondly, he did not tell Shruti about his relationship with Aditi when they met before the engagement. Finally, throughout the series of events he looked at it from the traditional angle of the male-dominated world. When he got engaged to Shruti he took Aditi for granted and assumed that she would somehow overcome the shock. When he broke off the engagement with Shruti, he again assumed that

Aditi would accept him. Finally, when he got engaged to Shruti and when he broke the engagement he did not consider what the implications might be for Shruti at both steps. He looked at every step from his point of view and that of his parents. With a more progressive outlook he could have prevented matters from going even as far as they did.

Rahul's case helps us realize how important it is to think through our decisions and hold our own instead of succumbing to what others may expect of us. Though the entire family may be involved in arranging and planning the wedding, ultimately what matters is the happiness of the two people getting married. If Rahul had married Shruti and had continued to have feelings for Aditi, it would have been unfair to everyone involved. On the surface it may seem that it was not good to break off the engagement with Shruti, but if Rahul was unhappy after marriage there is no way that Shruti could have been happy. If both of them had ended up unhappy, their families would be unhappy too. By being honest with himself Rahul finally did a service not only to himself but also to Shruti and both their families.

Arranging a Marriage with Minimum Challenge

A marriage is not easy to arrange and even under the best of circumstances there is no guarantee that it will be a happy one. George Bernard Shaw suggested that if the names of all eligible boys were written on slips of paper and put in one bag, those of all eligible girls were similarly put in another bag, and a blind-folded five-year old were asked to pick a slip from each bag to match them, the marriage has as much of a chance of success as the matches arranged by any of the more cumbersome methods commonly followed. Although what he said has a grain of truth, it is rather cynical, and the 'bag-marriages' are unlikely to achieve any modicum of popularity. In contrast, there is emerging in India a synthesis of arranged and love marriages which minimizes the challenges of match-making and maximizes the chances of success. Unhappily, this synthesis is confined to a small educated, urbanized, elite fringe. The parents may themselves have had a love marriage, or even if they had an arranged marriage they have seen enough of love marriages among their friends and relatives to realize firstly, that it is difficult to have the best of both worlds; secondly, that times are changing fast; and

finally, that old may be gold but new is not necessarily counterfeit. With this background, preparation begins in childhood. The child is sent to a co-educational school. During the turbulent teens parents bring up the topic of sexual relationships just as naturally as they do other topics, which are relevant to a good, happy and fulfilling life. By the time the child is ready for a serious and steady relationship, the parent is like a friend to him/her and he/she has been trained to make a good choice. The child is encouraged to find a mate and in such situations, does not hesitate to share with parents the relationships he/she gets into at a fairly early stage. Thus parental signal—green or red—and guidance are available before things go too far. Because of the friendly relationship and easy communication between the parent and the child their agreements and disagreements can be sorted out through healthy discussions. And in case of a crisis, the child also has a receptive shoulder to cry on. The criteria for selection acceptable to the child and the parents are also not so divergent because the parents also disregard barriers of caste and community and do not like the dowry system—two important factors to which love is blind but conventional parents never are. Regarding matching socio-economic and educational levels, the child may be more flexible than the parents but this difference is easier to reconcile and children with the background we are discussing right now are pragmatic enough not to make a serious blunder. Thus, although the child finds its own mate as in a love marriage, the parents are also significantly in the picture and play a role in the fate of the relationship—whether it continues and culminates in marriage, or breaks down.

Another ‘helpful’ feature of the synthesis of love and arranged marriage is that if in spite of the ‘freedom’ the child gets to find his/her mate, the child fails to find one, the child does not have to stay single throughout life. Because of the prevalent culture of arranged marriages, parents seldom abdicate their responsibility completely. If the child has failed to find a partner and time is running out, they activate their match-making instincts and start a search among their friends with children of marriageable age. Besides the parents, other relatives, friends, colleagues—of the parents and of the lonely heart—also pitch in. The result is that the lonely heart does not have to stay lonely for long. I know of a father who told his young son,

“Son, go and find a wife for yourself. If by age 30 you haven’t found one, come and tell me. I shall say, ‘Shame on you’ and then find one for you”. Yet another told his daughter, “If you have anybody in mind it makes things very easy for me. If you don’t, it is time I start looking for a boy for you”. Yet another father, while talking to the father of the girl who his son had found said, “We will be here only for a few years more. It is the children who have to live with each other, and much longer. If they like each other let us facilitate their happiness”. A grandfather while talking about his grandson who had just got married said, “He made things very simple for us. It was an arranged marriage—we had to arrange only the feast!” In short, a few parents now equip their children well with life skills as part of their upbringing including some grounding in marital relations. They trust their children, treat them as independent adults and friends, and yet are available for consultation and crisis management, including the crisis of the child having failed to find a mate. This synthesis of the old and the new is probably a good guarantee for happy marriages.

After the Event

The challenges before marriage are only the beginning; no way do they end with marriage. Marriage just marks the replacement of one set of challenges by another. Some challenges are common to all marriages. Others vary based on whether it is an arranged or love marriage, on whether the couple lives in a nuclear or a joint family, and whether the wife is a homemaker or part of the workforce.

Challenges and Overcoming Them

Once the honeymoon phase is over most couples are in for a shock. They have heard a great deal of how hearts get replaced by clubs after marriage, but labor under the illusion that their marriage is going to be an exception. The realization that marriage is not all play (as they may have imagined) but actually a lot of hard work is difficult to swallow. Therefore, if you go into marriage prepared for a lot of hard work, it may just make things that much easier. The work may begin once you realize that it is difficult to

share, not just your life but your bedroom and bathroom with someone else for the rest of your life!

Imagine two individuals with their own lifestyles; preferences in terms of food habits, mealtimes and bedtimes; hobbies and interests; and attitudes to work, time, money and life in general. After marriage they are suddenly expected to function as one unit. It would be impossible to do that without negotiating their differences and working out a way to make decisions together, and developing an accommodating attitude to make the decisions work.

Along with all these, another crucial aspect of our lives that is bound to undergo a change after marriage is our relationship with others. It would probably be accurate to say that one has to renegotiate one's relationship with parents, siblings, other members of the family, friends, neighbors and colleagues. Marriage may involve moving to another city and therefore greater physical distance from people who have been very important in our lives. Marriage also means devoting more time to the new family we have just embraced. This can only be at the expense of the relationships we nurtured earlier. It is almost as if the homeostasis of an existing system has been disturbed as a result of marriage. It is not that this system cannot be brought back to a new state of homeostasis; it just needs some time, understanding, patience and readjustment.

The manner in which our relationship with the family changes after marriage depends on many factors. One of these factors is how the relationship was before. Some individuals may have had an extremely close relationship (to the point of being unhealthy) with their family of origin (the family they were born into) where people were always aware of each other's business, constantly interfering and over-involved in each other's lives. If this pattern continues after marriage, it may prevent the spouses from developing a healthy relationship with each other. On the other hand, some individuals might have always maintained a distance from their family of origin. If they have an inherent fear of intimacy and are driven away by closeness in a relationship, they may have a hard time getting close even to their spouse. Marriage may give both these types of individuals an opportunity to initiate a change for the better in their relationship with

their families of origin. Individuals who have a too-close-to-be-healthy relationship with their family of origin may start by drawing healthy boundaries around themselves and define their identity separate from their families. Only when they are able to establish a healthy sense of self will they be able to develop a healthy relationship with their spouse and also with their families of origin. Individuals who are scared of intimacy may have their own reasons for it. It is possible that they were hurt in the past and their trust was broken. They may start by gradually allowing themselves to let their spouse into their lives and sharing more of themselves. This will help rebuild the trust that they may have lost and break down the wall that they had created around themselves. Now they may find it easier to establish optimal intimacy also with their family of origin.

People who have a healthy relationship with their family of origin find it easier to also build a healthy relationship with their spouse. This does not, however, imply that people who have had an unhealthy relationship with their family of origin cannot have a healthy relationship with their spouse, or that people who have a healthy relationship with their family of origin will always have a healthy relationship with their spouse. It only means that people who have an unhealthy relationship with their family of origin may have to deal with more past baggage and confront previously unresolved issues to prevent some of these issues from spilling over into their marriage. This is important because no matter how much we like to say that we will not be like our parents, when we grow up, we often find that we eventually turn out to be more like them than we would like to believe or admit. Therefore, unless we make a conscious effort we may find that we repeat some of the same patterns of interactions with our spouses that were played out in our families of origin. In other words, marriage may give us an opportunity to uproot these unhealthy patterns and also build healthy relationships, including and especially with our spouse. However, this opportunity is not always used adequately.

Another crucial factor that defines how our relationships change after marriage is *gender*. In the Indian tradition the bride is typically supposed to leave behind her family of origin and enter the groom's family and embrace it as her new family. This may differ in some families in Kerala and the

northeastern parts of India where families are matrilineal. In matriarchy, the family name is passed on through the mother, the husband lives at his wife's residence after marriage and females inherit the property (Kapadia, 1966). But Das (2001) found that mixing with and finding their mates in the patriarchal society, modernization and urbanization have led to changes in the norms and attitudes of the minority matriarchal society, which is transitioning towards a patriarchal pattern at a rapid pace.

On the other hand, with changing times even in families that are patriarchal, daughters now maintain close ties with their families of origin even after marriage. Men, on the other hand, are expected to not only maintain close ties with their families of origin after marriage, but even to continue staying with their parents, uncles, aunts, brothers, etc. As a result of marriage they may sometimes feel torn between the loyalty toward their wife and the family of origin. How this plays out also depends on the living arrangement of the couple. If they are part of a joint family where the grooms' parents and siblings also live with them things may be quite different from that in a nuclear family where the couple live alone. In a joint family the adjustment required on the part of the daughter-in-law is greater and the couple has less independence, flexibility, privacy and time for each other. On the other hand, in a nuclear family the couple may have greater independence but may also have to take on much more responsibility in managing the household.

Since the wife is expected to assimilate herself into her husband's family after marriage some relationships that need special attention are the relationship between the daughter-in-law and the mother-in-law, and the relationship between the wife and her family of origin. The daughter-in-law and mother-in-law relationship has been notorious since time immemorial. The mother-in-law fears losing her control and authority within the family as well as the special position in her son's life after his marriage. The daughter-in-law has to adjust into a new family and assimilate herself without causing rifts within the family. Often the problems between them stem from a power struggle. In this delicate relationship it is important to distinguish between an issue and a non-issue. If either party is gracious enough not to blow issues out of proportion, many situations can be resolved easily.

Both the wife and the mother may be possessive about their husband and son respectively, and may feel threatened by 'the other woman'. This may make him feel torn between his loyalty toward his mother and his loyalty toward his wife. It is important to realize that he has a unique relationship with both his mother and his wife (with neither being more important than the other) and that neither can replace the other. Therefore, there is no use competing. Competition generates bitterness and makes life miserable, particularly for the man whom both the women love. This realization can help them all live in greater peace.

In addition to these challenges, if the wife's parents try to continue to control their daughter's life it adds fuel to the fire. To balance these conflicting pulls exerted by well-meaning and very close relatives is quite a challenge for all involved. But the state of the young couple is especially pitiable because firstly, they have just entered the kindergarten of married life. Secondly, they do not even know each other too well, particularly if it was an arranged marriage. Finally, it is the couple's lives that are at stake. If disharmony becomes intolerable, everybody else can get out of it by just running away from the situation. It is only the couple for whom staying together or walking out of the marriage often becomes the choice between the fire and the frying pan.

Case Study

Kavita and Sandeep got married 6 months ago. Kavita came from a well-to-do family and had not seen her parents struggle to make it big in life. She had a comfortable life growing up and her parents provided her with whatever she needed without her having to ask for anything. Sandeep had just started his first job a few months before getting married. He worked at an entry-level position for an MNC and Kavita was a homemaker. Soon after the wedding Kavita's parents started giving the couple expensive gifts each time they saw each other. Sandeep also noticed that Kavita spent a lot of time on the phone with her mother and sisters discussing matters that concerned him and Kavita. He was not comfortable with the expensive gifts and did not appreciate her discussing their personal issues with her family members. He wanted to bring this up with Kavita but at the same time did not want to hurt her or her family's feelings.

Discussion

It is natural for Kavita and Sandeep to look at the situation quite differently. To Kavita, the fact that she is now married has not made such a big difference that she starts treating her family of origin as aliens. All her life she has accepted whatever her parents have provided her without hesitation and formality, and shared her life with them freely. She does not see anything wrong with continuing to do so.

Sandeep however, has accepted Kavita as someone with whom he will share the rest of his life. He expects that from now on they will manage with whatever he is able to provide, find fulfillment in the love they have for each other rather than in material comforts, and share exclusively with each other their deepest thoughts and feelings. He does not want anyone to come between himself and Kavita, not even her parents. Any attempt on the part of Kavita's parents to add to their comforts hurts his self-respect. Any intimate discussion between Kavita and her family becomes a violation of the exclusive relationship he has with her.

The result is that Kavita's family's well-meaning but excessive involvement in her life is actually hurting her marriage. Her family may feel that they are helping Kavita and Sandeep by providing them the comforts that they cannot yet afford. They may also think that as her parents they can offer advice on her personal issues with Sandeep: after all they have so much more experience and wish the couple well. But in the process they do not realize that they are hurting Sandeep's self-respect and are actually preventing Kavita and him from developing a healthy marital relationship. Thus, in spite of their good intentions they are unwittingly making their daughter unhappy. As discussed Kavita has a very close relationship with her family (to the point of being unhealthy). In the language used by marriage and family therapists there is a triangle formed by Kavita, Sandeep and Kavita's family of origin. Whenever the tension between two individuals increases they have a tendency to pull in a third person, object, or entity (e.g. child, work, alcohol) in order to reduce the tension between the dyad, and form a triangle in the process. It is important for Kavita's family to disengage themselves from the triangle so that Kavita and Sandeep are forced to pay attention to their relationship and deal with it.

Although it may be difficult, Sandeep needs to do some tough talking with Kavita and make her see how her parents' interference is hurting their relationship. He can make it clear to her that this does not mean that she should cut herself off from her family but that she needs to set more healthy boundaries and maintain them. Further, she is the best person to explain to her parents how their well-meaning actions are actually making her unhappy. She should also make them realize that material comforts are not essential to her happiness, while her relationship with Sandeep is. Further, if her parents blame Sandeep for over-reacting she should defend him and tell them that that would be the normal reaction of any self-respecting young man.

Another factor that can give rise to challenges after marriage is the age at which the individuals get married. If both partners are in their early twenties they may not be financially and emotionally equipped to handle the challenges that come with marriage. It may mean that the partners may or may not be able to achieve their educational goals. If they also choose to have children at a young age, that may bring additional stress into their lives. On the positive side the advantages of early marriage are that the couple will have more years together and be able to grow together. They will also be more flexible and probably more accepting of each other's influence than individuals who are older when they get married. On the other hand, if the partners are in their late twenties and thirties when they get married, they may be more set in their ways and less open to influence. They may value their independence too much to be able to make the adjustments that are required with marriage. Life's experiences might already have disillusioned them and made them cynical and skeptical. Therefore, they may lack the passion of young love. But they are more likely to be financially and emotionally ready to handle marriage. They are also more likely to have attained their formal educational goals and have a better idea of who they are and what kind of person they would like to marry. But it would not be right to say that they have it all figured out because no one ever does. We are constantly learning and re-learning throughout life.

Thus, there is no definitive age that may be considered the right age for getting married. Couples that get married when they are in their early

twenties, as well as those that get married in their late twenties or thirties, can both be very happily married. But it is important to consider the pros and cons of getting married early or late, as it will allow one to make a better-informed choice about the age at which to get married.

Arranged marriages

A challenge that comes with an arranged marriage is living and sharing one's life with someone one barely knows during the first few months after marriage. Some couples may have been married after just a couple of brief meetings with each other. We usually take time to form friendships and it may sometimes be years before we are comfortable going on a one-week holiday with a friend. How difficult it must then be to suddenly share a bed with someone one hardly knows.

Case Study

Sheela and Raghav had an arranged wedding. They had met each other only once before the wedding. Sheela did not know what to expect on the wedding night. She was shy and had some inhibitions about sleeping with her husband on their wedding night. She had a lot of questions and did not know whom to ask.

Discussion

To a woman, love and intimacy are more important than, and should ideally precede sex. Further, having been brought up in a rather conservative society, Indian girls may be a little shy even on the wedding night. On the other hand, sex is uppermost on the mind of a man and he finds it difficult to wait after he has the legal and social sanction for it.

Women in Sheela's situation may be able to bring down their level of anxiety by talking beforehand to married friends and some married women in the family. This often helps them get better prepared to start a relationship with someone they hardly knew before marriage. The traditional male expects that by getting married he has acquired the right to disrobe her and have sex with her on the wedding night. He interprets any shyness or inhibition shown by the girl as frigidity, or even worse, as an indication that she has not accepted her husband fully, possibly because she had been in

love with someone else to whom she failed to get married for some reason. Men need to show greater understanding and sensitivity on this point.

In an arranged marriage one has to be prepared to discover many annoying and irritating things about the spouse. This happens in a love marriage too, but one may often discover many of these things before marriage and hopefully, one makes a decision to go ahead only after accepting them rather than expecting the spouse to change after marriage.

Having realistic expectations and telling yourself that you will find annoying and irritating things about your spouse is a good way to prepare for this. While this will not completely eliminate your frustration regarding those things it will make it much easier to handle.

Love marriages

A major challenge distinguishing a love marriage from an arranged marriage is the high expectations that the partners have from the marriage. They often have a romanticized view of marriage and expect that the high they felt during the courtship will last forever and they will live happily ever after. They are disillusioned when they discover that the romanticized view of marriage is a myth. It may become difficult for them to deal with the cumbersome details of everyday life after the carefree period of dating.

It is important for couples to have only realistic expectations from the relationship and their partners. Putting on romantic glasses and seeing a hypothetical angel in an imperfect human (and, all humans are imperfect) is a sure recipe for disappointment. Therefore, it is helpful to talk about these expectations during the courtship. How does the other person view marriage? What are the expectations from you and the relationship? What will make him/her happy? The answers to these questions may help you better determine their suitability as a partner for you.

Case Study

Nishant and Pooja were very happy when their two-year relationship finally led to marriage. They were very excited about the prospect of spending the rest of their lives with each other and looked forward to building a home together. Their happiness was very short-lived, however. Pooja got tired of picking up

after Nishant. She told him that he needed to put his dirty clothes in the laundry basket and his towel on the towel stand after a bath. They found it difficult to agree on whether or not to switch on the fan since Nishant felt hotter than Pooja. Nishant wanted to visit his family every weekend whereas Pooja would have liked to spend some of the weekends either alone with Nishant or with their friends. When Nishant was ready to have a serious conversation after dinner, Pooja was ready to go to bed. Before they knew it, their picture-perfect marriage had turned into a nightmare. They had no clue what had gone wrong. Ironically, all their friends kept telling them they were made for each other.

Discussion

No matter how long a couple has known each other before marriage, there are several problems that surface only after marriage. Therefore, the new phase of life requires that a new equation be established through constructive communication. The things Nishant and Pooja are arguing about just happen to be incidental. If it were not these issues it would be something else. The underlying deeper issue is the control and decision-making power in the relationship. Nishant and Pooja could either communicate in a competitive or submissive manner, which leads to a win-lose situation or they could communicate in a cooperative manner, which leads to a win-win situation for both of them. Another thing that they definitely need to avoid is trying to read each other's minds. No matter how well we think we know someone, we do not know exactly what the other person is thinking. Therefore it is best to ask and clarify instead of making assumptions.

If Nishant assumes that Pooja does not like his parents because she wants to spend the weekends with him or their friends he would be making a mistake. Similarly, he should not assume that Pooja does not want to talk to him because she is sleepy each time he is ready to have a conversation with her after dinner. It is important for them to bring up these issues and discuss them.

Now we come to the better ways to communicate about these issues. If Nishant tells Pooja that he thinks that she does not visit his parents because she does not like them, or that she does not find him interesting any more

and therefore feels sleepy every time he wants to talk to her, she is definitely likely to get defensive. Similarly, if Pooja tells Nishant that she did not marry him to wait on him and pick up after him, he is likely to get defensive. These conversations may become arguments in which both aim to defeat the other. This win-lose approach sets the stage for escalating hostilities.

Instead, Nishant could tell her that he would also like to spend time with her and their friends. And therefore what does she think of visiting his family and spending time together or with friends on alternate weekends? She is much more likely to respond positively to this conversation. Similarly, they could work out another time that both of them find more suitable to have a conversation, since late at night does not work for Pooja. She could also request Nishant to put his dirty clothes in the laundry basket and his towel on the stand instead of losing her temper about it. These conversations are more likely to lead to a resolution and a win-win situation for both of them.

If the parents of the partners were not happy with the wedding, they may take time to accept the son or daughter-in-law into their family. This can cause hurt and pain. The couple needs to give the parents sufficient time to accept their son or daughter-in-law; it will not happen overnight. During this phase maintaining their patience and making an effort to win the parents over can be important for the couple.

Even if the partners come from separate backgrounds and have got married acknowledging and accepting their differences, living with these differences could be another story. Sharing things that are important to them with their partner can be helpful. For example, if celebrating a certain festival is important to you, you should share that with your partner and discuss the role he/she would be comfortable to play in the celebration. If one is non-vegetarian and the other is vegetarian it is important to decide how this will be handled at home so that both partners are comfortable. If they have different mother tongues one has to consciously ensure that the other person does not feel left out during family visits or that the language difference does not breed a lack of trust in the relationship.

*Joint family***Both partners working**

In the Indian culture living in a joint family was the norm until a few decades ago. But increased individualism and people moving to different places for work has led to the breakdown of the joint family system. Here the term joint family is used for families where the couple lives with the husband's parents and may also include the husband's siblings, his grandparents, uncles and their families. In a joint family the couple has to balance their needs and wishes with those of the other members of the family. We are focusing on the couple but in fact, every member especially the women of the family, has to sacrifice his/her individuality for the survival of the joint family. The joint family system offers stability, and also security for the disadvantaged or incompetent members of the family. But the price for these gains is individual freedom and progress. In the joint family, there is very little privacy and very little time that the person or couple can call their own. Women, if not working outside the home spend most of the time on household work, childcare and gossip. Anyone wanting time for personal growth through some creative activity or socially relevant work becomes the odd one out and for that reason alone may become the victim of unfavorable opinions, and also get blamed for the breakdown of the joint family, imminent or actual.

Initially, we will talk about the challenges where the couple lives with only the husband's parents. In many joint families even if the woman works outside the house she may be required to meet all the expectations of her husband and parents-in-law related to the tasks at home. She may be expected to cook, clean, get the children ready for school, help them with their homework and more. Often, living in a joint family inhibits the daughter-in-law from asking her husband for help with household chores. It is also less likely that the husband will take on responsibility for these chores. This may put pressure on the daughter-in-law to be a superwoman. On the other hand, in cases where the daughter-in-law is not willing to help at home the mother-in-law may be resentful about having to shoulder too much responsibility.

Since both partners work outside the house it is important in such families to talk about realistic expectations from each member of the family based on the time they have available, their age, health condition and other factors. A family meeting may be a great way for such a family to address its concerns. The family members can sit together every couple of weeks to check in with each other and address any concerns about division of labor, family functioning, finances and other matters. Using the communication and conflict management skills discussed later in this book will help the meeting progress smoothly.

If the mother-in-law is a homemaker she may be proud of the fact that her daughter-in-law has a job. Alternatively, she may try to exert more power over her in order to make up for the power that the daughter-in-law may have gained because of the extra income she brings into the family. This may mean that the mother-in-law makes most of the decisions at home and the daughter-in-law feels deprived of her freedom and independence. On the other hand, the daughter-in-law may also be proud of her accomplishments outside the house and may treat her parents-in-law in a condescending manner.

Since both partners are working outside the house and live in a joint family they may find it very difficult to spend quality time together. This lack of time together as well as privacy may take a toll on the marriage.

Case Study

Shobhna and Sumit got married a year ago. Both of them had full-time jobs and long commutes to and from work which left them with very little time at home. Sumit's parents lived with them. They had a maid that came in to do most of the household chores. Shobhna was still responsible for most of the cooking and shopping. After a busy day at work, Shobhna would freshen up and enter the kitchen to prepare dinner. After Sumit came home all four of them had tea together. Sumit would then watch TV and Shobhna would go back into the kitchen. After dinner she would wrap things up in the kitchen, pack Sumit's and her lunch for the next day and soak the dirty dishes in water for the maid to wash the next day. By the time she went to her bedroom,

Sumit would usually be snoring. On the weekends Shobhna would do the shopping for the week. She would also get busy with things around the house that got neglected during the week and needed her attention. On some weekends they would invite or visit extended family and friends. This left Shobhna and Sumit with very little quality time for each other. They had almost become strangers living under the same roof.

Discussion

Sumit is behaving like a typical male who feels he is exempt from household work especially if the family has employed a maid. The fact that Shobhna is also working does not change this perspective. On the other hand, Shobhna can see that Sumit has time for the TV as well as going to bed early while she is always on a treadmill of household duties. Above all, they have no time to talk to each other, whereas communication is the foundation of a healthy relationship.

It may be helpful for this family to organize a meeting to revise the division of labour at home. If Sumit and his parents could take over some of Shobhna's responsibilities it would release some time for her to be on her own, as well as spend it with Sumit. Although it may seem very mechanical, with the busy lives they have Shobhna and Sumit may have to schedule time with each other in advance just the way they schedule an appointment with the doctor. Making their relationship a priority will help them make time for it.

After a couple has young children the grandparents may resent having the responsibility to look after them while the couple is at work. The grandparents may want to enjoy their hard-earned retirement rather than start the care of infants and toddlers all over again. They may enjoy playing with the grandchildren ad lib rather than take near-total responsibility for their care. On the other hand, in some cases parents may resent the way grandparents look after the children.

The challenges of living in a joint family where the couple lives with the husband's parents as well as siblings and uncles are somewhat different and far more complex. Usually, in such families there is a hierarchy and everyone abides by the final decision made by the head of the household. Financial

decisions and everyone eating from one kitchen are particularly ticklish issues. The younger generation may not be comfortable with the elders in the family making all the decisions. Sometimes they may get unsolicited advice in personal matters, which may be construed as interference. If both partners are working and the wife is not able to contribute as much in the kitchen as some of the other non-working women in the family it can create simmering tension, which has a tendency to explode periodically.

Case Study

When Jharna got engaged to Sanjay what she feared most was how she would adjust to the joint family structure. Sanjay was living not just with his parents but also the family of an uncle (Sanjay's father's elder brother, Vijay). Sanjay's father Ajay and Vijay lost their father when Ajay was only fifteen and their mother when he was eighteen. After that Vijay took care of Ajay's education and marriage. Sanjay's father therefore treated his elder brother like his father and had continued to stay with him. When Jharna got married to Sanjay she became the twelfth member of a family, which had three generations living under the same roof and sharing a single kitchen. She was amazed to see the degree of harmony in such a large family. The key figure behind the harmony was Vijay. He made sure that as far as possible every member's wishes were fulfilled. Moreover, in doing so he made no distinction between his own and Ajay's children. He pampered Jharna more than his own daughters-in-law. Whenever they could, the family ate together, played together and prayed together. They tried to do things together whether it was cleaning the house, going for an outing, watching TV or just talking. Jharna was a schoolteacher and continued to teach but like the other earning members of the family she handed over her salary to Vijay. Within a year of getting married she was pregnant. She was given the choice of continuing to work or quitting. She chose to continue working. After her maternity leave she went back to work. When she was at school she was at peace because there were enough women at home to take care of her baby. There were crises as during an illness or when the domestic help suddenly left. But there were people in the family to buffer the impact of such crises. The family carried its weight effortlessly and kept moving slowly but surely, and peacefully.

Discussion

Jharna has taken to her large joint family as a fish takes to water. Her marriage to Sanjay, happy and successful though it is, has become an inconspicuous part of a much larger enterprise. The key ingredients of a happy joint family are an impartial patriarch with sound leadership qualities, like Vijay, and conforming daughters-in-law, like Jharna. The other important prerequisite for keeping such a family together is that they spend enough time together. It is not necessary that the time be spent on creative or intellectually stimulating activities; rather, it is the other way round. Therefore, such a family does not foster individual growth. The family thrives at the expense of the individuality of its members. However, with changing times it is becoming increasingly crucial to the survival of the joint family that some personal space is also available to each individual. For example, in this case, Jharna continued to work after marriage and when she was pregnant she was given the choice of doing what she liked. Balancing individual growth and collective good is the most delicate factor determining the survival of a joint family.

In a family with a large number of members it is important to constantly highlight and consider the positive aspects of each person and their likeable qualities rather than what you do not like. Another thing that can help is to always treat others with respect and the way you would like to be treated. The ability to be a good team player and change one's role seamlessly based on the demands of the situation are added assets.

An autocratic style of leadership in a joint family usually gives rise to suppression and feelings of discontentment and unhappiness. Mutual respect accompanied by open communication can help members reap the benefits of living in a joint family.

Wife a homemaker

After the wedding a daughter-in-law who is a homemaker spends her day with a family that is new to her. It may take time for the family to grow on her and she grows on them. Until then she may feel inhibited in front of her parents-in-law and may hesitate to state her preferences in food, mealtimes and other things.

It is natural for a new daughter-in-law and her new family to take some time to adjust to each other. The husband and parents-in-law can play a role in making the daughter-in-law feel comfortable. Treating her like a family member rather than an outsider is a crucial step. Enquiring about the foods she likes, the time she gets up, eats and sleeps, and making a sincere effort to be considerate is a good idea. This will encourage her to treat them like family.

Case Study

Rachna and Gautam had an arranged marriage a month ago. Rachna was a homemaker and lived with her husband and parents-in-law. She was a shy and reserved person and was still getting used to the ways of her new family. Gautam went to work in the morning and returned around 7pm. Her parents-in-law stayed at home with her during the day. They were polite and pleasant. However, in her parents' family Rachna was used to having lunch and dinner rather early. In her new family both mealtimes were much later than what she was accustomed to, so she was extremely hungry by the time her parents-in-law were ready for lunch. She felt hesitant to have a snack to stop her hunger pangs before lunch. At night she was very sleepy by dinnertime and also ate with the uneasy feeling that she was doing something unhealthy. In addition, her mother-in-law liked food that was too spicy for her. Being newly married she did not know how to convey all this to her parents-in-law.

Discussion

It is traditionally expected that after marriage the girl would adjust to harmonise her lifestyle with that of her new family. The husband and in-laws not only expect this, they sometimes do not even give enough thought to the type of difficulties their lifestyle might entail for the newcomer. They probably assume that the way they live is the best if not the only way, to live. "If we have been living happily like this for years, why can't she", is what they feel.

Instead of assuming that it would be most natural for Rachna to adapt to the ways of her new family, it might make Rachna feel much better if

someone also talked about how she found life in her new home different and if she found something inconvenient. Gautam and her parents-in-law can initiate these conversations as a way to get to know her better. It is quite possible that with time Rachna may also develop a taste for more spicy food and get accustomed to late meals. But till then the concern and sympathetic understanding which she receives can be a big relief to her and can go a long way in cementing her relationship with her new family. If Gautam or her parents-in-law do not initiate this conversation, Rachna can raise this topic on her own in an appropriate manner, which is not offensive to anyone in the family.

It may be assumed that in case of a love marriage the adjustment within a joint family might be easier because at least the couple have known each other for some time and have an easy communication. But that is not necessarily so for a variety of reasons. First, the romance generally ends with the marriage. The couple discovers many things about each other only after marriage, which disturb their mutual adjustment. Secondly, the boy finds himself in the unique position of holding two positions—that of the husband and the son—which both involve responsibilities that may conflict with each other. Finally, if initially his family had resisted the marriage, the relationship between the daughter-in-law and parents-in-law may remain uneasy even after marriage.

Case Study

Akshay and Deeksha were next-door neighbors and fell in love. Their mother tongues were different and there were a few other differences in the family backgrounds. Therefore, initially the families specially Akshay's family, were opposed to their marriage. But the young couple persisted and finally brought the families around, and the marriage was solemnized. Akshay's father is in business and his mother also helps in the family business. Akshay used to freelance earlier but soon after marriage took up a job with a BPO company and has night duties. That leaves just Akshay and Deeksha at home during the day. That might look like a boon for the young lovers but within a few months it turned into a nightmare. Akshay wants to sleep during the day so that he can

stay awake at night, whereas Deeksha wants him to help with the household chores. Further, Akshay soon discovered that Deeksha is just as dominant a personality as his mother. The result has been frequent bickering between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law, which Akshay finds very difficult to handle. One consequence of Akshay's frustration has been that although he and Deeksha still live in the same house as his parents, they cook in separate kitchens. Akshay has a married brother who lives abroad. Deeksha often cites his example, and tries to persuade Akshay to also migrate abroad to be able to live in peace. But Akshay thinks he has a responsibility towards his parents and therefore does not want to leave them alone. The result is that although Akshay and Deeksha live under the same roof, they hardly sleep together or talk to each other except to argue and fight.

Discussion

In this case, Akshay's parents, particularly his mother, have probably not accepted Deeksha truly. They have let her into the house out of compulsion but have not let her into their hearts. To them she is like someone who has stolen their son and legalized the theft. Deeksha can sense the rejection and from her stronger position now as the legally-wedded wife of their son, she is using her power to 'teach them a lesson'. Between Deeksha and Akshay the euphoria of love has faded. Deeksha now resents the fact that she has Akshay and yet cannot control him fully. Akshay feels crushed between his commitment to Deeksha and his responsibility towards his parents.

The details may differ widely but the sort of scenario outlined in this case is not at all uncommon. While there is some truth in the point of view of each party involved, each of these can be refined to a higher level. Akshay's parents cannot change the time they took to reconcile to Akshay's relationship with Deeksha but they can bend over backwards to convince her that they have now accepted her as their daughter. If done in all sincerity, Deeksha would sense the change. If she finds the change she should also be willing to reciprocate. Further, she has to realize that while Akshay may have opposed his parents when he wanted to marry her, agreed to have a separate kitchen for the sake of domestic peace, but he will never be able to sever his link with his parents. Any effort on Deeksha's part to make him forget his parents

will not only fail but also boomerang and affect adversely the love he has for her. Akshay is in a difficult position because of being under the pressure of conflicting responsibilities, but he is also in the unique position of wielding considerable power with his parents as well as Deeksha. If he makes a sincere effort to be fair to everyone involved he will be able to make life peaceful for himself as well as others.

If the parents-in-law and daughter-in-law get along well with each other a joint family in which the wife is the homemaker can be a very happy one. But if there is tension between them it can lead to a lot of unpleasantness within the family. If the mother-in-law is also a homemaker both she and the daughter-in-law are likely to be home most of the day. With greater interaction between them the chances of misunderstandings also multiply.

Case Study

Ravi and Gauri met each other while working in the same office. After they discovered that they had in each other a potential partner, they started spending more time together to get to know each other better and to go over some crucial issues. For example, Ravi was the only child and his parents were not in very good health. Therefore, it was understandable that he expected Gauri to stay in a joint family and not work after marriage. Since there was some parental opposition to the alliance, they simultaneously started to work on their parents. Finally, the two sets of parents also met each other, added their seal of approval and the marriage was solemnized. After marriage Gauri gave up her job. Her mother-in-law was happy to let her take charge of the house. Gauri slipped into her new role of a homemaker without much difficulty and started to enjoy taking care of the house and her parents-in-law. She does not get much appreciation for what she does, but she does not mind. Sometimes she is criticized but her dictum is to listen more and talk less. If she feels strongly about something Ravi is her sounding board. As far as possible Ravi takes the blame for anything that goes wrong. Gauri has the satisfaction of showering love on Ravi and his parents without expecting anything in return. One the whole, she is happy that she has been able to join the person whom she loves and who loves her.

Discussion

The combination of criticism without appreciation is a typical pattern in joint families. It takes time for the newcomer to the family to understand the expectations of her in-laws and it takes them time to grasp the full extent of the contribution she is making to the family. Therefore, the daughter-in-law has to generally wait patiently to earn the love she deserves. In that sense Gauri is on the right track. Ravi is also quite understanding in taking the blame whenever possible because he will be able to get away with a lot more than Gauri—in general, it is a good principle for both partners to take the blame themselves when dealing with their family of origin.

Although this marriage is happy and successful it may seem to be a little unfair to Gauri. But that again depends on the way one looks at it. To be able to put somebody else's needs ahead of our own is an essential feature of true love. It is through such love, which hurts our personal interests that we grow spiritually, and spiritual growth is the ultimate purpose of human life. Giving out of love is not a mental exercise; it needs an opportunity in real life to practice it. Gauri has, in her in-laws, that opportunity. If she looks upon them as her opportunity for spiritual growth she will consider them a blessing that has been brought into her life through the infinite love that God has for her.

In a joint family where the husband's siblings as well as uncles and their families live under the same roof the birth order matters a lot. If the couple lies at the lower rung of the ladder of seniority they are more likely to have to listen to the wishes of their elders. The new daughter-in-law who is a homemaker is likely to have to follow the instructions given by the older women in the family. It is likely that her role in the family will also be predefined.

Although a new daughter-in-law in a joint family with many members may be expected to fit into a mould, she can create a niche for herself by showering her love and care on the members of the family. The ability to provide universal love that does not discriminate as well as the ability to dissolve one's ego can make one go a long way in a joint family. Tolle (2005) points out that complaining, faultfinding and reactivity feed the

ego and strengthen it. When we complain we imply that we are right and the person or situation we are complaining about it wrong. The feeling of being right strengthens the ego more than anything else. Tolle says that all that is required to become free of the ego is to become aware of this phenomenon, since awareness and ego are incompatible.

Nuclear family

A nuclear family consists of just the couple and their children, if and when they have them. In India, where a joint family is the norm and 'going nuclear' requires a justification such as geographical distance in order to be considered decent, any couple that achieves the 'nuclear status' is thought to have achieved heaven. But life is never perfect and nuclear families have their own brand of challenges to grapple with.

Both partners working

With more women in the work force and increase in geographic mobility the number of families that fall in this category have increased enormously over the last decade. A big challenge that comes with this type of family is the division of labor regarding household responsibilities. Since both partners work outside the house the woman may expect her husband to share responsibilities at home instead of expecting her to do most of the work. If they have part-time help for household chores there may be a crisis the day the help does not show up.

For such a family to function smoothly without any one feeling over-worked it is important for the couple to share responsibility for household chores. If they have the privilege of full-time help at home it would definitely make things easier. The partners could choose what they would like to do around the house based on their ability and interest. If that does not work they could just come up with a chore chart based on a draw of lots that can rotate every so often! We will discuss this further in a section on gender roles, work and family.

Another challenge that double income couples often face is the conflict between their personal and professional lives. What if the husband has a wonderful career opportunity that comes up in a different city? Should

they enter a long distance marriage as a commuter couple? Or should the wife quit her job and move with the husband and then look for a new job? What if the roles were reversed and the wife came upon a great career opportunity in a new city? Would that change the decision they make? Dilemmas like this call upon us to make some tough decisions and choices in our lives. They also make us more aware of the fact that no matter how much we may want things to be black or white, we have to become more comfortable with the shades of grey that make up our lives. There is nothing right or wrong about any of the decisions taken in such a situation. The partners should be able to reach a joint decision that they are both comfortable with. These situations may also be handled by making a short-term decision and the couple may revisit the decision after a period of time.

If the new job that the husband has found is in the city where his parents live, deciding to move may also mean becoming a joint family. In such a case, if the couple decides not to move, the daughter-in-law is likely to be blamed for it, irrespective of whose decision it is.

Case Study

Jatin and Tanya had a love marriage two years ago. At the time of the wedding Jatin and Tanya worked in Bangalore and both their parents lived in Mumbai. A few months ago both of them took up jobs in Mumbai. They were happy to be moving to the city where their parents lived. This would allow them to spend more time with the family. Jatin anticipated that if he and Tanya lived with his parents it could lead to unpleasantness later. Also, if they lived with Jatin's parents the commute to their offices would be very long. They wanted a good balance between quality time with family and quality time for themselves. They therefore decided to take a place close to their offices. His parents did not seem very pleased with this decision to stay separately. Sometimes when Jatin and Tanya visited them over the weekend and Tanya was helping her mother-in-law in the kitchen, she would tell Tanya that the neighbors often asked her why Jatin had set up house separately and she did not know what to tell them. This upset Tanya especially since she never said this in front of Jatin, implying it was her fault that they were staying separately.

Discussion

Although the decision to live in a separate house has been taken by Jatin and Tanya together, it is natural for Jatin's parents to assume that Jatin would have liked to stay with them. Therefore, they would suspect that Tanya has forced Jatin to live separately. A denial by Jatin may also not remove this suspicion. This is typically a problem of a society going through a rapid transition. It is difficult for Jatin's parents to understand that he may not want to live with them for a variety of reasons. He may find it more comfortable to be near his office. He may have a lifestyle that does not harmonize with that of his parents. He can understand that good people may be able to have good relations so long as they are not living under the same roof. Living together multiplies the points of contact and therefore also the points of conflict. Hence, they may be able to do more for one another living separately than if they live under the same roof. Only time can clear the air somewhat. If Jatin and Tanya continue spending quality time with his parents and are always available in time of need, the parents might see the situation in a different light.

In this situation Tanya has no control over what Jatin's mother thinks or says. She can either react to the situation or she can respond to it. If she chooses to react to it she is more likely to get angry with Jatin's mother and let out some steam by shouting at Jatin. If she chooses to respond to it she is likely to ignore the comment and let it roll off her back while she decides whether to discuss the matter with Jatin in a calm manner later.

Both partners may argue about how much time they should spend with both families of origin. Both partners may want to spend more time with their own family of origin as compared to the spouse's family. Since this couple has a shortage of time it may be important to plan visits to both their families as well as friends in advance. If possible they can try and spend time with both sides of the family on festivals. If that is not feasible they can take turns visiting both sides of the family on the festival every alternate year. It can be a great help if their families do not pressurize the couple and let them take decisions without making them feel guilty.

Case Study

Deepak and Nidhi met each other when they were both studying for their doctorate in USA in the same university and staying in the same apartment complex. They had been born and brought up in India. Very realistically, they had remained single in spite of parental pressure but they had no strict objection to getting married to the right person at a suitable time. This time was approaching because they were both about to finish their doctorates and time was running out as they were both getting on in years. Further, they found in each other a suitable person. They had both had a middle-class upbringing in educated families in urban India. Although they were part of a large group of Indian students in the university and had been friendly with the whole group, as Deepak got to know Nidhi better through friendly interactions he saw in her a suitable partner for life. Finally, he picked up the courage to reveal his feelings to her. At first Nidhi was polite but said no. Going by the dictum that when a lady says 'no' she means 'may be', Deepak did not lose hope. That Nidhi had no problem with continuing to be a friend strengthened the hope. Not only that, when Deepak fell sick she looked after him with almost maternal tenderness and that gave them more time to spend with each other. Deepak told Nidhi that his arms were still open to her. Now, instead of giving a direct response Nidhi brought in the parents. She said that both his and her parent's attitudes were also important before they could take the proposal seriously. Deepak found this response better than before. They both discussed the proposal with their parents. They also talked to each other about real life issues such as future plans about where they would prefer to stay, whether both of them would work, having children, attitude to money, charity, socializing patterns and just about everything that could matter. Fortunately, both sets of parents also proved to be very understanding. They basically took the stand that their happiness resided in the couple's happiness. The quick acceptance by both sets of parents in spite of Deepak and Nidhi hailing from different states in India not only facilitated the finalization of the alliance, it also made them feel accepted by each other's family. Now it is more than two years since they got married. They both stay and work in USA. Both sets of parents have visited them. They have no major issues with each other or with the parents. During this time they have weathered periods of difficulty such as illnesses and uncertainties

about jobs and visas. But they have passed these tests of life wonderfully. In periods of difficulty they have proved to be each other's strength. Nidhi works but always treats Deepak's job as more important. She has decided to live wherever Deepak has the best job and try to find herself a job there. Deepak used to cook and manage his apartment when he was doing his doctorate. He continues to share these chores with Nidhi. With a firm commitment to each other and faith in God they have been able to live a peaceful life.

Discussion

The success of Deepak and Nidhi's story may be attributed to a judicious mix of realism and romance. They enjoy the love and trust of their parents. They love each other but they have not allowed emotions and sentiments to blow them off their feet. Their love is based primarily on what they can give each other rather than what they can get from each other.

Although both partners in dual income nuclear families bring paychecks, some wives may be asked by their husbands to hand over their paychecks to them. In such situations, even though the woman contributes financially to the running of the household she has no real economic independence. This can be very disempowering for women. In some cases, if they try and stand up for their rights, the husband may physically abuse them for speaking up or disobeying him. For this to change at a societal level, we need to change the way we condition our children and treat our boys and girls as they are growing up. Only if the men in our society learn to respect women and stop treating them like commodities or their personal property will we see a change. Some men have already started giving women the respect that they deserve and treating them as equals but many more need to do the same before we can be a different type of society.

Raising a child can bring additional challenges in such a family. How will responsibilities of raising the child be shared? If the child is ill, who will take the child to the doctor and stay at home, if necessary? If the child has to stay back in school for extra-curricular activities, who will pick up the child from school if they do not have a chauffeur?

The transition to parenthood changes every couple's life. But dual-earner couples have to make some crucial decisions with the birth of a child. From

what I have seen, different couples handle the situation differently. Some women quit their jobs to stay at home with their children for a few years. Others hire full-time nannies to look after the child. Still others may leave their children in day-care centers. Yet others may drop their child off at a parent's place before going to work and collect him on the way back. This is not an exhaustive list of things that can be done. But it is important that both partners feel that they have a hand in the decision that is made and are comfortable with it. Neither partner should feel compelled to comply with a decision taken by the other.

Wife—A homemaker

As compared to all the permutations and combinations discussed earlier, this family lacks the stresses that come with living in a joint family as well as those faced by a double income couple. Therefore, it is likely to have the least number of challenges provided the marriage has otherwise clicked.

Case Study

Akash has only vague memories of his mother because she passed away when he was barely three. His father had remarried and the stepmother had not treated him well. Under her influence even his father had become hostile to him. Soon after finishing school he took a job in a private company. Then he had an arranged marriage with Chitra. Soon after marriage, he moved out and set up an independent home. He earnestly hoped that his life would now change. Life was not easy. His income was modest. Chitra was also not highly educated and therefore it would not have helped much even if she worked. But Chitra proved an extremely efficient and thrifty homemaker. Her needs were limited. She relished living on less. She cooked delicious food with inexpensive ingredients. She did not waste any food. She kept the house neat and tidy. With her artistic sense she decorated the house by metamorphosing waste material into mantelpieces. She took pride in living within their means and saving for a rainy day. Akash just had to hand over his salary to her every month and could depend upon her to manage the house. With total relief on the home front he could concentrate on his work in the office. He worked hard

and his seniors came to depend on him more and more. Correspondingly, they saw to it that he got promoted to more responsible positions. Chitra was not only a good manager but also a very loving person. Akash now had everything that he had missed in childhood. He was happy to be a loving husband to Chitra who was the one person who had changed his life.

Discussion

Akash and Chitra's story looks like a fairy tale. As life goes on they are sure to experience the vicissitudes of life. But the ups and downs will not be able to rock their marriage because it is founded on the perennial values of love, commitment and simplicity. The type of deprivation that Akash experienced in early life can sow the seeds for these values but the credit also goes to Chitra for providing the conditions under which the values have been able to germinate and flourish. These are the values common to every happy family. That is why it has been said that all happy families resemble each other; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.

When the wife is a homemaker it is important that this decision is her own. If she is forced by her husband not to work in order to look after the house and the children they may have, she can end up feeling stifled in the relationship. She will feel empowered if she has the free choice to make the decision about whether she would like to have a career or be a homemaker.

A homemaking wife in a nuclear family may or may not have enough interests to keep her busy while her husband is at work. If she does then she is likely to have a life of her own which keeps her happy and busy apart from her relationship with her husband. But if she does not then she is prone to feeling lonely and may rely too much on her husband to give meaning to her life. The situation changes after they have children, but now her life may revolve around the children to an extent that is not good even for the children.

Case Study

Yamini and Saurabh have been married for a year. Saurabh is in the civil services and Yamini is a homemaker. They have a comfortable house allotted to them through the government. They have help at home to cook and clean.

Yamini reads and watches TV during the day apart from overseeing what the maid is doing. As the evening approaches she eagerly waits for Saurabh to come back from work because she does not know what to do with herself. If he is running late she sits at the doorstep and waits for him feeling thoroughly bored. Her life completely revolves around Saurabh and it is difficult for her to fathom what it would be like without him.

Discussion

Yamini has no real problem and yet she has a problem. No work is worse than any work. The only work she can see is being with Saurabh, but he is not available much of the time. She needs to understand his limitations and find a constructive solution to it. It is possible that Saurabh too is not applying his mind enough to at least understand Yamini's problem. If he did, he could possibly help her find a constructive solution.

In this situation if Yamini is able to develop some independent interests and hobbies that keep her productively busy she will have a life of her own. It will allow them both to have a good balance between a sense of separateness and connectedness in their relationship. In other words, if they are able to enjoy their time apart they will value and enjoy their time together more. If Yamini need not work to earn an income, she can do voluntary work that interests her. Helping someone is the best way to be busy and to forget one's problems without any conscious effort. If Yamini's life completely revolves around Saurabh he may perceive her as constantly breathing down his neck and that may make him feel smothered in the relationship.

In a nuclear family where the quality of companionship within the family depends exclusively on how happy the husband and wife are in each other's company, they focus all their attention on each other. The result is that differences in opinion, personality and preferences, which get overlooked in a large family, may become a cause of disharmony in a nuclear family.

Case Study

It is almost five years since Tushar and Meeta got married but they have not been able to stop bickering about small things. The current underlying all their conflicts is basically a difference in their personalities. Tushar is extrovert,

talkative, happy-go-lucky and has a good sense of humor. Meeta is serious, cautious and matter-of-fact. She finds it difficult to engage in idle conversation and cannot crack jokes. Tushar finds her an embarrassment at parties. To make matters worse, he finds her rather cold also in personal life because she is hesitant to express her love. Meeta realizes these differences and thinks her husband's taunts are justified, but finds it difficult to change herself. The result is that she finds an inferiority complex gnawing at her.

Discussion

We are all different and being alike is not essential for a happy marriage. Often, differences may make the couple complementary and therefore happier. That is possible to some extent also in this case but Tushar does not sufficiently realize this. If Meeta had been equally talkative and jovial he may have found himself side-lined at parties! However, genuinely mismatched couples do exist, especially in case of arranged marriages. It is important to realize that when two persons are different, it does not necessarily mean that one is good and the other bad, or one is right and the other wrong. What Meeta needs is the courage of conviction. While she may try to change she does not have to feel inferior. Expressing love is easier and more important than becoming an extrovert or cultivating a sense of humor. On the other hand, Tushar need not rub in what Meeta lacks—he needs to understand that she is different, why she is different and try to accept her as she is. He might be amazed to discover how much love she is capable of in times of a crisis.

2



Dynamics of Intimate Relationships

Ultimately the bond of all companionship, whether in marriage or in friendship, is conversation.

Oscar Wilde

Intimacy goes with love and depends on a certain degree of merging of identities. People who are intimate with each other merge, so also do their interests. They accept mutually and happily that their joys and sorrows are inter-linked. It is impossible for one of them to be happy when the other is unhappy. Thus, they are either both happy or unhappy. It is not possible to continue an intimate relationship for long just because two persons are bound by marriage or blood. It is impossible to sustain an intimate relationship unless true love exists because it goes beyond give and take, beyond logic and beyond keeping a mental record of who needs whom. Intimate relationships are put to test in situations of conflict and crisis. If the partners offer each other unconditional love in such situations, the intimacy is strengthened. If they fail to do so, the relationship is soured even if it is not disrupted completely.



Communication and Conflict Management

Usually the most frequent complaint that couples have about their relationship is inadequate and difficult communication. On the other hand, many of their problems would not exist if only they communicated enough and with ease. Therefore, it is important to address some of the issues concerning communication, especially those that are relevant to couples.

A common source of problems is the way men and women communicate. Men typically engage in what is called report talk, that is, conversation aimed mainly at conveying information. On the other hand, women engage in rapport talk, or conversation to gain or reinforce rapport or intimacy. Women often talk because they want to be heard and validated. Men on the other hand, want to fix problems and offer solutions. The result is that they get upset when they cannot fix the problem. They do not realize that the woman is not necessarily expecting a solution: she is content just to have a patient listener with whom she can share the problem.

These gender differences often lead them to respond differently to difficulties in close relationships. Women usually like to talk about the issue whereas men tend to withdraw emotionally. This pattern is so common that therapists call it the 'female-demand/male-withdraw' or the 'pursuer/distancer' pattern.

Case Study

Himanshu and Shikha had been married for five years. They lived in a joint family with Himanshu's parents. They also had a child. There was just one major problem they had not been able to solve. Himanshu was out of the house for work most of the day while Shikha was at home. During this time she had several minor problems with her parents-in-law because of the difference in their attitude to money, servants, food, child rearing, etc. When she was in bed with Himanshu at night, she often narrated to him the incidents of the day, including and specially those in which she had felt annoyed, irritated, ignored or humiliated while dealing with his parents. Himanshu was rather impatient while listening to her, not only because he was tired and did not want to be bothered with this after a day's work but also because he could see the truth in what she said but could not help her. His constant refrain was, "All that is right, but at their age my parents cannot change. Therefore, you have to learn to adjust to their mental make-up". The result of such frequent exchanges was a growing fissure between them, which was threatening their marriage.

Discussion

This is a problem arising from the partners being unable to understand a few gender differences. First, the need to share events is far greater in women

than in men. Secondly, when upset, women need a sympathetic listener more than a solution to their problems. On the other hand, when confronted with a problem a man's approach is down-to-earth—he wants to solve the problem. If he cannot, he feels like a failure and may give vent to his frustration. Further, because of the growing distance between them Shikha and Himanshu are probably also punishing each other by denying love to the partner or rejecting the partner's efforts at love-making. The result is that they are both further frustrated, especially Himanshu because the need for sex is greater in a man and he is ready for it even if there is not much real love left between the partners.

The solution lies in at least one of the partners realizing these gender differences. For example, if Shikha realizes it, she can explain to Himanshu that she understands the generation gap between herself and his parents as well as their inability to change. Therefore, she does not want him to do anything and is just venting. She should further tell him that he is the only one with whom she can share everything and feel better. This would boost Himanshu's male ego—after all, who does not like someone to be dependent on him? Now he knows that he does not have to solve a problem—he himself is the solution. He would also be relieved to know that he does not have to pick a quarrel with his parents. By providing Shikha the comfort she is seeking he would find her much more receptive to love-making too. Thus, the differences between Shikha and her in-laws will not be able to take her away from Himanshu, which is what really matters in the long run.

Case Study

Manu and Nitu had been married eight years and had a school-going six years old child. One day he brought back a note from school telling them that he had problems with studies. Nitu was very upset and shared this with Manu who did not pay as much heed as she would have liked. After all, it is only a six years old, he has plenty of time to improve in studies, etc. he thought; moreover, he was tired after a hard day's work in the office and did not see what he could do right then to solve the problem. The next day as he was leaving home for office, he told his wife to be ready in the evening to go to a

dinner related to his official work. She responded by saying, “The child has got a bad report from school and you are interested in parties and dinners”. He retorted, “You are mixing up unrelated issues. How will not going for dinner improve the report? You are always finding excuses for not coming to my office dinners”. He left for the office in a huff. He was tense and unhappy in the office throughout the day, and so was Nitu at home.

Discussion

This is again basically a problem arising from gender differences in styles of communication. Nitu just wanted to unburden herself at night by sharing the school report with Manu. He did not see that need, but instead concentrated on how important the issue really was and what he could do about it. Since Nitu did not get from Manu what she wanted, she remained upset till the morning and the mention of the dinner became the trigger for her to hit back. Manu was once again logical and down-to-earth in his approach but failed to take into account Nitu’s emotional needs. Further, he used the dangerous word ‘always’—“you are always finding excuses...”. That didn’t really help matters!

After what happened in the morning both of them were going to be sad throughout the day. Further, an altercation in the evening was also almost certain. Through all this, it would be difficult for her to do anything for the child either. Nitu could take a constructive approach to the situation. She could make a call to Manu in his office, tell him that she was sorry for unnecessarily mixing up unrelated things and that she would go for the party. It is difficult to say sorry and therefore, the one who says it is a very brave and courageous person. It would be hard to apologize, but once she gathered the courage and did so she would feel much better and lighter so quickly that it would be worth it. Further, Manu would experience something similar in the office. Why not make the day better for both of them. Having done that, she would be in the right frame of mind to spend a couple of hours teaching the child after he returned from school. That would be a constructive way of handling the note from the school. Then she could go for the party and enjoy it, without any sense of guilt. Thus, the episode that could have led to simmering tension for long could be avoided.

Case Study

Vishal and Shalini had a love marriage six months ago. Vishal sometimes came home from work a couple of hours late, as he had to take the company's clients out to dinner. He would call Shalini during the day to inform her of this. After he got home, Shalini would ask him several questions about the dinner (who attended, whether there were any women, details about them, etc.). Shalini seemed suspicious and jealous and her questions suggested that Vishal might have been having an extra-marital affair. Vishal started emotionally withdrawing from Shalini each time she made these insinuations. This made her even more suspicious and she would nag Vishal all the more. This made him distance himself from her even more.

Discussion

The above case study is a classical example of the 'female-demand/male-withdraw' or the 'pursuer/distancer' cycle. Shalini's persistent questioning and need for reassurance feels like nagging to Vishal and he emotionally distances himself from her. The situation demands that at least one person respond differently to it. If Vishal stops withdrawing and reassures Shalini, she will not feel the need to nag him anymore. On the other hand, if Shalini stops nagging him, Vishal will not feel the need to withdraw anymore.

The behaviors described here are stereotypes and need not necessarily apply to all men and women. Men and women often behave in these traditional and stereotypical ways due to the social influences while growing up. Boys are told not to cry and not to show their emotions, whereas it is quite acceptable for girls to do all that. Girls are expected to be more expressive and relationship-oriented than boys. In order to change these stereotypes we may have to treat our boys and girls more alike.

These gender differences in communication may also influence how men and women choose to show their love to their partners. Women tend to be more verbally expressive than men. They show their love through words, whereas men tend to be more instrumental, which means that they like to do things to show their affection. For example, a woman may write a note or card for her partner, whereas a man may hang a painting on the wall, which his partner had been asking him to do for a long time.

Gary Chapman in his book *The Five Love Languages* talks about five different ways in which partners express their love to each other. First, use pleasing words such as appreciation, compliments, encouragement and sympathy. The words should come from the heart and not just be said for the sake of saying them. Second, spend time to do something together, whether eating, talking, watching TV, going out or reading something interesting to the partner. The important thing is that the attention is focused on the partner, he/she can see that effort has been made to do things together and finally, doing it together should be more pleasing to the partner than doing it alone. Third, exchanging gifts as symbols of love. Gifts may be purchased, found or made. Fourth, acts of service, which may require thought, planning, time, effort and energy, or perhaps just caring during an illness. Cooking, cleaning, doing the dishes, walking the dog, changing the baby's diaper are all acts of service. Fifth is physical touch that may be quite different from the touch during sexual intimacy. It may be just holding your partner's hand while going for a walk, a peck on the cheek while saying good-bye or a hug, especially when the partner is going through a bad time. Chapman believes that different people prefer different love languages. The language that they understand the best is their primary love language. That is the language in which they would like to be loved. The mistake we often make is that we try to love our partners in the language that is our primary love language but that may not be our partner's primary love language. The way we like to be loved may be different from the way our partner likes to be loved. It is important for us to discover our partner's primary love language early on in marriage during specially intimate moments. This knowledge can be used to strengthen the marriage, and also to make one's partner feel truly loved in moments of stress.

Case Study

Dheeraj and Divya had been married for 7 years. They had two children: a girl who was six years old and a boy who was four. Dheeraj was a successful manager in an MNC. He had steadily climbed up the professional ladder and was doing very well in his career. Divya was a homemaker. She kept herself busy decorating the house, reading, supervising the maid and spending time

with the children after they came back from school. She helped them with their homework and took them out to play in the evenings. Dheeraj usually came back from work after 9 pm. He often had to work even on weekends. Dheeraj showered Divya with expensive gifts. He would buy her jewellery, cosmetics, clothes and flowers. She had a chauffeur-driven car at her disposal all day. It was difficult for him to understand why Divya seemed sad even though she had every possible physical comfort she could ask for. She wanted him to spend more time with her and the children. Dheeraj tried to explain to her that he worked such long hours so that he could provide the best comforts for her and the children.

Discussion

In the above case study Dheeraj has failed to understand Divya's primary love language. He has been talking to her through the love language of gifts. Dheeraj certainly loved Divya and he assumed that she would feel his love. But Divya's primary love language seems to be quality time. Since Dheeraj is not talking to her in her primary love language, her love tank is still empty as Gary Chapman would put it. Dheeraj needs to talk in Divya's primary love language for her to feel loved. More than the gifts, Divya would feel loved if Dheeraj made time to talk to her about her day and played with their children. He could also spare a thought to admire and appreciate her invaluable contribution towards bringing up their children. Divya should also understand that life can never be hundred percent. The fact is that lots of people today have to choose money over lifestyle in order to lead a materially comfortable life—whether it is the right choice is another question—but then, what the right choice is, is something the couple has to decide together while being fully conscious of what they are ready to trade for the sake of what else.

How we say something in a conversation may be even more important than what we say. This brings us to the importance of non-verbal communication. Whether we maintain eye contact or not, the tone of our voice, the volume, the emphasis on words and our posture, among other things, may make all the difference to the way our words are interpreted. “I love you” whispered gently in the partner's ear would mean something very

different from “I love you” screamed in his face even though the words are the same. When we doubt whether the other person is speaking the truth we tend to pay more attention to the non-verbal cues. And these can tell us more accurately the true meaning behind the words.

John Gottman has done extensive research on couples in the United States. In his research he found that anger and conflict in themselves are not good predictors of divorce in couples. The factors that he found to be really good predictors of divorce were contempt, criticism, defensiveness, stonewalling and belligerence. Contempt is a feeling that one’s spouse is inferior or undesirable. For example, “I didn’t know you could be so mean”, or “You are such a coward”. Criticism involves making disapproving judgments and evaluations of one’s partner. For example, “My father knew you were not good enough for me—wish I had listened to him”. Defensiveness is preparing to defend oneself against what one presumes is an upcoming attack. For example, “Next you will say all this happened because I did that”. Stonewalling is unthinking blanket refusal to listen to one’s partner, particularly to a partner’s complaints. For example, “I am sick of all your stories. Go on, go on, as long as you like, but I am not listening—do you understand”. And then, keep interrupting the partner with, “You are just wasting your breath” or “I haven’t heard anything”. Belligerence is behavior that challenges the partner’s power and authority. For example, “Who do you think you are?” or “What do you think I am—your servant or something?” or “After all that you have done to me, you have lost the moral right to ask me that”. These characteristics abound in unhappy marriages.

During his research with couples Gottman observed interaction sequences between partners. Behaviors such as sadness, whining (complaining) and fear were coded as negative affect (feelings) of low intensity. Behaviors such as belligerence, contempt and defensiveness were coded as negative affect of high intensity. Behaviors such as showing interest, affection or shared humor were coded as positive affect. In some cases one partner’s whining was reciprocated by the other partner’s belligerence. Gottman and his colleagues called this kind of exchange refusing-to-accept influence. The spouse at the receiving end of the other’s complaints refuses to pay any attention and

instead escalates the fight. On the other hand, some couples communicated with positive affect, responding to each other warmly and with interest, affection and shared humor. Positive affect usually toned down the conflict. Gottman found that positive affect in situations of conflict predicted marital happiness.

Case Study

*Shweta and Anshul have been married for 2 years and live in a nuclear family. One morning when Anshul could not find his wallet before going to work and asked Shweta to look for it, she told him that he was **always** misplacing things and then ordered her around (criticism). Anshul accused Shweta of **always** ('always' and 'never' are dangerous words, which always aggravate a quarrel!) making things more difficult for him instead of helping him out (criticism). Shweta told him that she was treating him the way he deserved to be treated (contempt). Anshul retorted by name-calling (contempt). Shweta reciprocated. Anshul responded by asking her what she could do, now that she was married to him (belligerence)?*

Discussion

In this scenario the fight escalates. The couple is using negative affect of high intensity, which leads to increased hostility instead of de-escalating the fight. Now the fight is no longer about the misplaced wallet; it is about the power and roles that they play in the relationship. Instead of responding to Shweta by criticizing her in return, if Anshul had tried to either consider her complaint or responded with humor (which was not mean or contemptuous) it might have de-escalated the fight. Addressing the issue of her feeling like she was being ordered would have been more constructive than evading the real area of conflict and leaving it unresolved.

It is important to keep in mind that during a fight we may end up saying very hurtful things to our partners, which we may regret later. It is possible to apologize for what we may have said but it is not possible to take those words back. Often these hurtful things may become part of the baggage that our partner carries around for a long time. Couples frequently bring up

these hurtful things during future fights, which can be very unhealthy for the relationship.

Along with the positive affect mentioned earlier, there are other communication skills that can help improve our relationship with our partners. Active listening is one such skill. Active listening requires that we suspend judgment and spend more energy trying to understand the other person. Often when someone is talking we are already thinking about what we will say next. When we do this, we are not actively listening to what the other person is saying. An important listening skill is to restate the speaker's ideas and feelings for verification. This is also known as checking-it-out. When we do this we not only show that we are paying attention to what the other person is saying but also share what we have understood from what they said. This gives the other person a chance to clarify or explain themselves if they find that we have not understood them correctly. You may wonder why this is important. One may think that obviously the message sent by the speaker will be the message received by the listener. But it is not that simple. There is a lot that can happen during the transmission of the message because of which the intended message (by the sender) may be quite different from the perceived message (by the receiver). The receiver's mental and physical state, his/her perception of the sender and many other factors can influence how he/she perceives the message. Therefore checking-it-out can help reduce misunderstandings.

Another technique that helps facilitate communication is using 'I-statements'. An I-statement is a statement that starts with an "I feel..." An example could be, "I feel frustrated while I wait" instead of "You frustrate me because you are always late". I-statements help us express our true feelings instead of placing the blame on someone else. In the above example, the statement that starts with a 'you' is likely to make the other person defensive. But when one expresses one's feelings while owning it, it can start a healthy dialogue. I-statements may not come naturally to us initially but with practice they can become a part of how we communicate on a daily basis. For that we need to be conscious and aware of how we choose to express ourselves.



Gender Roles, Work and Family

With more and more women entering the work force, marital challenges are also on the rise. Women feel the pressure to turn into superwomen. Even as they are rebelling against having to take on total responsibility for maintaining family relationships and the smooth functioning of the household along with their careers, they typically feel guilty if they do not continue to do what is expected of them.

Working women are often torn between conflicting claims such as those of the career, husband, children, parents, parents-in-law, friends, etc. and they want to do justice to them all. It is important to acknowledge that they cannot possibly do it all. If they are under the impression that there are other women who are able to do everything, they possibly have only a partial and hazy glimpse into the lives of these women.

Case Study

Sneha got married to Sanjeev a year ago. For the past 3 years she has been working at a call center and has continued to work there after marriage since the extra income she brings helps run the household. But her life has changed tremendously after marriage. She leaves for work at 9 pm and comes back at six in the morning. After she is back from work she prepares breakfast for her husband before he leaves for work and packs his lunch. After saying good-bye to him she prepares breakfast for her parents-in-law, tidies the house and then goes to sleep at 9 am. She wakes up at noon to prepare lunch and goes to sleep at 2 pm. She wakes up at 5 pm and prepares tea and dinner for the family. She is usually quite tired by the time she leaves for work at 9 pm. With this gruelling schedule she also has to fit in frequent visits to the doctor since her father-in-law recently had a bypass surgery and her mother-in-law has hypertension. Her parents live in the same city and over the weekend she tries to visit them. She usually likes to cook for them while she is visiting so that it gives her mother a break. Sneha is always there for a friend in need. She agrees to baby-sit her friend's baby when her friend has to go out to run errands. At work she listens to her colleagues' problems and tries to offer solutions. Sneha is

so busy being an ideal wife, daughter-in-law, daughter, friend and colleague that in the process she has forgotten who she really is.

Discussion

Sneha definitely seems to have forgotten herself in the process of pleasing everyone. Women often get squeezed between the generations of parents and children. They are usually expected to take on caregiving responsibilities for both these generations, which generally leaves them with no time for themselves.

Sneha needs to realize that she cannot and does not have to do everything perfectly, entirely and all on her own. She needs to start asking for help. It is important for her to talk to her husband and make him see that it is not humanly possible to go on like this for long. She can start off-loading some household responsibilities on to him, which will give her some breathing space. It is also important that she does not feel guilty because of this. Hence, it is important that she consider herself as her husband's equal. Women often say that they want men to treat them as equals but they actually treat themselves as inferiors.

There are a few things to keep in mind when we look at gender differences related to housework. Women often have a higher standard for housework than men. Therefore, when men do some housework women often criticize them. The result is that men conclude that no matter what they do it will never be good enough. The easiest way out is to not do it at all. Women therefore need to make sure that they do not nag men about not doing things the 'right way'. It is important to realize that one cannot possibly have it all. You cannot have someone else do the chore and expect that it will be done your way. After all, does it really matter if the shelf is not spotlessly clean, the chapati is not perfectly round or the baby's clothes are not matching? Isn't it more important to get some breathing time to recoup, relax and redeem one's life?

Women also often feel that household tasks are primarily their responsibility. Correspondingly, men assume that their role is simply 'helping out'. Thus, the male often assumes the passive role: he does things only when told to do so. Secondly, he thinks that whatever he does, howsoever

he does it, will not be good enough. Thirdly, he wants to be complimented for whatever he does because he has been 'a good boy'. Finally, he does not feel responsible for doing anything. Men never really grow up!

Just as women assume that household duties are primarily their responsibility, they also assume that going out to work and earn is primarily the responsibility of the man. They may work out of choice but do not like to do it out of necessity.

Case Study

When well-qualified and well-employed Shilpa got married to the IIT graduate Ravi belonging to an affluent family, the last thing they could have anticipated was financial problems. So secure did they feel that soon after marriage Shilpa gave up her job. A year later, Ravi also decided to venture out on his own and gave up his job. Unfortunately, things in his own business did not go as well as he had thought and in addition he developed some health-related issues, which seemed to have been triggered by working long hours on the computer. These events eventually shattered the marital harmony of the couple. Ravi started telling Shilpa to take up a job. Shilpa said that she felt that it was time to start a family rather than her taking up a job. Ravi told Shilpa that she was extravagant, and that she was being very uncooperative in not only not taking up a job but also not curtailing her desires. Shilpa told Ravi that he had made a big mistake giving up his job, and that he had taken this decision without discussing it with her. She told him to realize this and take up a job. He responded by saying that any job he got would involve long hours on the computer and that he would not be able to do justice to a new job until his health was restored. The result was that their financial difficulties and health-related problems were compounded by marital disharmony. What complicated matters further was that the couple was staying with Ravi's parents. While that provided a certain measure of financial security, it was at the cost of self-respect. The couple started feeling like a burden on the parents. This precipitated clinical depression in Shilpa. Instead of being extravagant she now went to the other extreme and did not seem to want anything. She attributed it to an enlightened victory over worldly desires born out of a deeper understanding of the spiritual truths of existence.

Discussion

Although Shilpa has worked before marriage, a woman likes to have a choice when it comes to working outside the home. She does not want to work (or not work) under compulsion. This is consistent with the conventional gender roles of the woman being the homemaker and the man the breadwinner. Further, she is right in expecting that Ravi should have discussed the decision to quit his job thoroughly with her, which indirectly means that he should not have done so without her consent.

Ravi has also behaved like a typical male in feeling entitled to take decisions like giving up his job on his own without discussing it with his wife. Further, in times of difficulty he expects his wife to be cooperative, which indirectly means that she should listen to him. When it comes to curtailing desires, again men generally do better than women. What looks quite frivolous expenditure to a man may seem quite essential to a woman.

One of the lessons of life, which is generally learnt at a heavy cost is that we have to be prepared to deal with completely unforeseen events. While marriages are arranged on the basis of what is predictable, life after marriage is unpredictable. Marital harmony in the face of unforeseen adverse developments needs commitment, courage, resilience and resetting of priorities. In this case, Shilpa has shown resistance to revise the gender roles. She looks at herself primarily as a homemaker rather than a breadwinner. While it may be true that Ravi gave up his job without her participation in the decision, it does not pay in the long run to go on harping on the past. It is much more constructive to look towards the future. If Shilpa had started working before going into the depression and reassured her husband that she is with him through thick and thin, their marriage would have been strengthened rather than weakened by the events. Further, their financial problems could have been mitigated and their self-respect maintained.

So far as spiritual enlightenment goes, it does lead to inner renunciation, which is commendable. But the absence of desires that results from depression and disgust is temporary and does not belong to the same category. However, those who have a good opening for spiritual development may be able to use any problem in life for spiritual growth.

With more women entering the workforce we need to pay attention to these issues. Striving towards a good balance between home and work is going to become increasingly important for both men and women. In the coming years we will start to see more evidence of how the balance affects our health and well-being in old age.



Managing Finances

Finances are often a cause of conflict for many couples. This can be the result of many different things. Partners may have different styles of spending—one may be a spender and the other a saver. Many couples do not make a budget or stick to it. Some families may overspend and rely too heavily on credit. One partner may use money as a tool to gain power and control over the other partner. Partners may also have different ideas about the meaning of money. It may be seen as status, security, enjoyment or control, depending on the meaning the person chooses to give it. These are among the many reasons that money may create conflicts in a relationship.

In the past, when the male was often the breadwinner and the woman the homemaker, the male usually had more decision-making power in money matters because it was he who brought in the money. In many cases though, where the couple had a trusting relationship, the man would hand over his salary to his wife. She would make the financial decisions and also ensure that all their basic needs were met and there was preferably some money left over at the end of the month. Some women did that by making a budget and others without it, but it is amazing how with very little education they managed money remarkably well and invariably ended up saving some money for emergencies and special occasions. In such families, men were happy to just bring the money in and admired their wives for taking on all the responsibilities of spending it judiciously. But now, with more and more women entering the workforce and becoming economically independent, the conversation about money in families is also changing. Families are definitely able to afford more but the unrealistic expectations from life and consequently, overspending and excessive reliance on credit is also on the

rise. Couples often argue about ‘my money and your money’, which can cause a serious rift in their relationship. Since money can be equated to power and control in the relationship, men whose wives earn more than them may find it hard to deal with.

Many couples treat money as a taboo topic. This can also lead to problems. It is important for couples to talk about the way each of them views money and how they would like to handle their finances at the beginning of their relationship. It is important that they come to a joint decision about it.

In some marriages where the man is the sole earner he may try and keep his wife out of all financial decisions. Even worse, they may not even share information about how much they earn and their spending with their wives.

Case Study

Prerna and Vaibhav have been married for a year. Vaibhav is the breadwinner and Prerna is the homemaker. Vaibhav pays all the bills and makes all the financial decisions. Whenever Prerna tries to get some information about their financial standing he tells her that if she needs anything she should just ask for it. He says that his duty is to provide for her but she does not have to be involved with their financial matters. This makes Prerna feel like an outsider in the marriage. This also prevents her from trusting him fully since he has some privileged information that he is hiding from her.

Discussion

There are at least two reasons why men behave the way Vaibhav does. One that sounds good is to think that men are better at maths and money matters. The man thinks that looking after mundane issues like money is a headache but it is his duty to do it and therefore he will—why does his wife want to bother with it. The other reason, which does not sound so good, is that this typically masculine behavior gives the man a sense of control over money. Control over a powerful resource like money makes him feel powerful. Traditionally, women have let men control money because it was they who invariably earned it, could handle it better because they were generally better educated and above all, because it ensured domestic harmony. But today, women are well educated, work outside the home and earn. Even when

they are homemakers they are conscious of the immense contribution, including the indirect monetary contribution they are making to the family. They are also conscious of their equal status and are willing to assert it. In the changed scenario, marriage implies the responsibility to share not only joys and sorrows but also information and money. Financial information is important for Perna to feel secure about her future. She cannot feel financially secure unless Vaibhav shares information about their income, expenditure and savings with her. It is her right as his wife to have access to this information. She is not being nosy or suspicious if she asks for it and needs to get that across to Vaibhav in an assertive and tactful manner.

In cases where both partners are earning, the question may arise about maintaining joint or separate accounts. That really is a decision that the couple has to make. Two separate accounts, which may both be joint accounts, one with the husband's name first and the other with the wife's name first, inspire mutual trust in marriage and also simplify matters in case of some questions that may be raised by the income tax office. Even if the partners maintain strictly separate savings accounts they may want to have a joint account in which they put a certain percentage of their salary for paying bills and general upkeep of the house. It helps to make a budget. Budgeting is the regular systematic balancing of income and expenses. To construct a workable budget couples must examine their personal values about saving and spending and also have a realistic estimate of how much things cost. Initially, they should establish their total income and then outline their expenses by category such as food, shelter, transportation, clothing and so forth. Thereafter they need to estimate how much money they will need for each category. The expenditure on some items such as house rent cannot ordinarily be reduced. In contrast, the expenditure on clothing is highly flexible. The allocation to items like telephone, electricity, petrol, etc. may be reduced if necessary to stay within the budget. Keeping a record of how much was spent on each category during the past year can help determine a more realistic budget. This may seem like common sense but couples usually do not take the time to make a budget. Of course, it is easier for an individual to make a budget, stick to it or even manage without one than it is for a

couple. They have to negotiate in a democratic manner to arrive at a consensus. Budgeting also needs continuous assessment and adjustment. A good budget builds in some personal control for each family member. It also distinguishes between wants and needs, with needs given priority but a few wants also satisfied, if possible. A good budget also avoids credit and if at all credit cards are used for making some purchases their cost should be treated as money already spent.

It would be helpful for couples to use the communication and conflict management strategies discussed earlier while discussing their finances and preparing a budget. It is also important for partners to be completely honest with each other about their earnings and expenditures. Concealing information can amount to a breach of trust and can rock the very foundation of the relationship.

Making Love Last

Usually the beginning of a relationship is marked by a high during which we are willing to devote significant time and energy to our relationship. Since we are in love nothing seems impossible and we seem ready to conquer all the challenges that may come our way. We want to do everything to keep our partner happy. But it is important to realize that this euphoria does not last forever. What can help keep the love in our relationship alive once the initial flush is over? To answer this, it is important to first understand what love means. Love is not just this warm and fuzzy feeling in our hearts. Love is also a choice. It is also an action and forgiveness. Above all, love is enjoying giving without expecting anything in return.

But you may ask, how can I continue to love people after they have hurt me, mistreated me and taken me for granted; after they have constantly taken from me without ever giving back. As Gary Chapman would say, how can I continue to love after my love tank is empty and I feel as if I have nothing left to give? In situations like this we can still choose to love our partners. It is possible that even our partners' love tank may be empty. If we are able to make a choice to love, our partner's love tank starts filling up.

Once that happens the partner may start to change. The choice we make may completely change our relationship.

Love is also an action. It is important to differentiate between love as a feeling and love as an action. You may say that it is hypocritical to express our love as a feeling when we do not feel it anymore. But we can still express it as an action. We can do something for our partners' benefit or pleasure. Hopefully, this can bring about a change in the relationship and enable us to experience love as a feeling again.

Love is also forgiveness. We may not be able to forget some things but we can always forgive. Each time we decide to hold on to something unpleasant that our partner says or does, we add to the baggage that we carry around with us. On the other hand, each time we are able to let go we actually feel lighter and freer. In his book *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life's Purpose*, Tolle (2005) says that trying to forgive someone does not work. Forgiveness happens when we see that a grievance has no purpose other than to strengthen a false sense of self and to fuel the ego. We do ourselves a great service when we forgive someone. We save ourselves a lot of time, effort and energy that would have otherwise been spent on the totally unnecessary task of harboring a grudge and adding to our pain.

It becomes a lot easier to forgive if we do not let our ego come in the way. Very often when we hold on to our anger or a grudge it is solely because our ego has received a blow. If we allow this ego to dissolve we may be capable of giving and receiving a lot more love and compassion in our intimate relationships. You can start by making an attempt to control your ego in your relationship with your partner. With time you can make an attempt to do that even in other relationships.

Another thing that is really important to make love last is to make your partner a priority. In the beginning of the marriage we feel that we need to discover a great deal about our partner and spend a lot of time together. But as time passes, we feel that we know everything there is to know and the time that we spend with each other diminishes. Other things such as work, children, household responsibilities, extended family and friends keep us busy. But in order to keep the marriage alive and healthy it is important not

to forget the partner. He/she should continue to be a priority for whom time has to be found, no matter what else gets neglected. Even when we feel that we know everything about our partner there is always something new to discover. Every person is like an onion; each time you peel it, you discover layers that you didn't even know existed.

Some couples spend very little time with each other while others spend too much time together. They may run a business together, have common friends, and share the same hobbies and interests. Spending too little or too much time together are both not very healthy for a relationship. The ideal is something in-between. Couples usually function best if they have a healthy balance between a sense of separateness and connectedness. In other words, it helps if they have some things that they enjoy doing together and others that they do separately. The time together helps them bond and increases their intimacy and sense of togetherness. The time apart gives them topics on which to talk to each other, helps them develop and keep their individual identity within the relationship and also prevents them from taking each other for granted. As Kahlil Gibran wrote long ago, "... stand together yet not too near together: for the pillars of the temple stand apart, and the oak tree and the cypress grow not in each other's shadow".

3



Challenges and Opportunities

You can't be value free when it comes to marriage.

Al Gore

This section addresses some issues that can challenge the survival of a marriage. However, they can also act as opportunities for personal growth and the growth of the relationship. Challenge and opportunity are like two sides of a coin: one can either wallow in misery when confronted with a challenge or treat it as an opportunity for growth and learning.



Abusive Relationships

Beating the partner or physical abuse is just one among a variety of abusive relationships. Abuse is any behavior that is designed to control or dominate another person. It may be physical, emotional, verbal or sexual. The common weapons of abuse are threats, humiliation, emotional blackmail or manipulation. Thus, it may consist of the threat to hit or kill. Emotional abuse may consist of statements such as, "I have done so much for you and this is what I get in return" or "If you don't listen to me I shall commit suicide and then you will realize how much I love you". Verbal abuse includes shouting, criticizing or abusing. When a person is forced to have sex with her spouse against her wishes it is still sexual abuse and may be termed marital rape. Very often one type of abuse may be accompanied by another type.

Case Study

Prakash is the middle of three children of his parents. He was not as good at studies as his siblings, one of whom is now a doctor settled in USA and the other is in a top managerial position with an MNC. Prakash is in a mid-level government job and his parents arranged his marriage with Savita. Prakash's parents have compared him to his siblings since childhood in an apparent bid to stimulate him to work harder and do better in life. After his marriage the comparisons have also spilled over to Savita who did not bring as much dowry as Prakash's elder brother's wife. After his father retired his parents spend most of their time with his siblings because they find their houses physically more comfortable. Prakash has been working hard in the hope that he will get promoted but as the system of promotions is rigidly linked to seniority, the hard work has not paid. The only result has been that his boss now depends on him more, thereby increasing his workload. His colleagues ridicule him for working so hard. Within a few months of his marriage Prakash started losing his temper with Savita on minor issues such as the food having too little salt or too much chillies. Sometimes he would misinterpret an innocuous remark and make a mountain out of a molehill. Concluding that Prakash is short-tempered Savita took extra care in cooking, cleaning and speech to avoid giving Prakash reason to be angry. But that did not help much. It appeared that Prakash did not need a real issue to be angry; he seemed to be on the look out for an excuse to lose his temper. Savita started to become afraid of Prakash and seeing her becoming more submissive his anger intensified and soon his violence turned physical. She resists and resents this and Prakash responds by threatening that if she told anyone about it, he would kill her. When she threatens to leave him he apologizes and blames his temper for his actions, and promises to behave better. But the promises do not last long.

Discussion

Although Prakash sometimes tries to justify his violence and sometimes apologizes for it, somewhere deep within he knows that what he is doing is wrong. All the same he finds it difficult to control himself at the slightest excuse.

Savita is puzzled by his behavior. She had not imagined marriage to be like this. Her father never behaved like that with her mother. She sometimes thinks Prakash may be on the verge of insanity.

Prakash has been at the receiving end since childhood. His parents, instead of recognizing the uniqueness of each individual have been comparing him to his siblings as if his relatively poor performance in worldly terms is his fault. After marriage Prakash has for the first time in his life, someone whom he can dominate. Being helpless in dealing with his parents or his boss, Prakash is trying to get a sense of control by abusing Savita. The situation is of course, very unfair to Savita. But it is bad also for Prakash and the marriage. His behavior will not compensate for his inferiority complex and satisfy his need for control very long. Further, in any bad marriage it is impossible for only one of the partners to be unhappy—it is always both who are unhappy. Savita is right in concluding that Prakash may be on the verge of losing his mental balance. It would be good for them to seek professional help before that happens. If Prakash does not agree Savita may use her threat to leave him as a lever to compel him to do so. If he still does not, she may actually leave home for some time to show him that she means business.

Both men and women may be abused by their partners but the risk of women being abused is much higher. Violence against women is prevalent across regions, communities, socio-economic classes and education levels. It may be expected that a higher level of education will provide women with the ability to protect themselves. But more highly educated women who are also economically independent may actually suffer more violence because they are trying to challenge the existing gender norms in our society and are active agents of change (Ghosh, 2007). Most spousal abuse begins within the first five years of marriage. Many women in abusive relationships remain silent because of shame and family honor. When they seek help they do so from family members and not from institutions.

There are many factors that may contribute to spouse abuse (Gelles, 2000). Power and control in relationships often tend to be at the root of violence. Men in our culture are socially conditioned to believe that they have a right to control women. They may also assume that aggression is an

acceptable response to stress and anger. A patriarchal family system influences men to assume a dominant role and women to assume a subordinate status. Given this, men often exert their power and control within the family through the use of physical violence. Low self-esteem may be an added factor. The abusive spouse may feel inadequate and may use violence to gain control. Although spouse abuse occurs in families at all income levels, economic stress may increase the likelihood of wife battering. Family isolation and the lack of a support network are more likely to encourage abuse. Alcohol also increases the chances of domestic violence by making the abuser feel less inhibited. But it is never the sole cause and drinking should not be treated as a legitimate excuse for assaulting someone. A boy who grows up in a home where violence is prevalent is more likely to be violent as an adult. Similarly, a girl who grows up in such an environment may consider this to be normal and acceptable. The prevalence of the dowry system is an important factor that perpetuates violence. The wife is often beaten to coerce her into bringing more dowry.

Clinicians have commonly observed a three-phase cycle of domestic violence (Lamanna & Riedmann, 2006). In the first phase, tension resulting from minor fights and arguments builds up over a period of time. In the second phase the situation escalates, eventually exploding in physical violence. In the third phase also known as the honeymoon phase, the husband treats his wife lovingly and rewards her for staying in the relationship. This cycle repeats itself and is difficult to break. Even though women do not like to be beaten they often continue to stay in the relationship for several years.

It is easy to say that the woman should walk out of an abusive relationship. But there are many reasons that prevent women from doing so. One major factor is fear. Women are afraid that if they leave, the husband may come after them. They fear being stalked, pursued and most of all being killed for walking out of an abusive relationship. This is also a reason why the abuse is not reported. Traditionally, women have been encouraged to put up with abuse and they may avoid reporting it due to shame and the dishonor it may bring to the family. Often, even if the woman tells her parents about the abuse they may advise her to restrict herself to measures less drastic than walking out of the marriage, but these measures seldom work. The woman's

economic dependence on her husband may also prevent her from severing the relationship. If the couple has children, the inability to support them and the adverse effect that a single-parent family will have on them may compel her to remain with the husband. She may also hope that eventually her husband will change for the better. If a woman has witnessed violence in her own family she may view it as a normal and acceptable part of married life. Finally, low self-esteem may interact with fear, depression, confusion, anxiety, feelings of self-blame and loss of a sense of personal control to create the battered-woman syndrome in which a wife cannot see a way out of her situation.

Due to the tendency to keep the violence a secret, victims are likely to feel alone. It is important to share their story and seek help in spite of the difficulties involved. Sharing her story with a few close confidants may help her to prepare a safety plan that she can resort to in case of a crisis. There are a large number of non-government organizations that provide counseling, legal assistance and community support to women and children who experience domestic violence in India. Although these organizations are based in metropolitan cities they are trying to spread awareness in towns and villages. The family can also be a source of great support for these women. Supportive families can do what the best government laws and shelters for victims of domestic violence cannot (Kishwar, 2005). Thus, it is important for women to feel confident that they will continue to get unconditional love and support from their families of origin even after they are married.

Couples can benefit from marital counseling. The therapist is likely to use his/her discretion to decide whether both partners should be seen together, or separately. Some work may be done in individual sessions with both partners before having joint sessions. Seeking help may help such couples to live together in peace.



Substance Abuse

Substance abuse/dependence includes addiction to not just alcohol or smoking but also to illegal drugs as well as prescription medication. Some

individuals may be addicted to only one substance while others to more than one. Persons who are physiologically dependent on a substance require more of it in order to give them the same high and get withdrawal symptoms if they do not take it. Withdrawal symptoms are not just psychological but also physical. Some common withdrawal symptoms include tremors, insomnia, nausea and anxiety. These differ with the substance to which a person is addicted. The focus of this section will be alcohol addiction but some of the problems faced by families where someone is addicted to another substance are similar.

Alcoholics can be of any age, background, socio-economic status and education level. Alcohol addiction affects the family, work and social life of the person. Alcoholism is a family problem, although it affects each member of the family differently. The spouse of an alcoholic may have feelings of self-pity, avoid social contact due to the fear of shame, suffer exhaustion and become physically or mentally ill. The spouse has to take on the role and responsibilities of both partners. Financial difficulty is an issue that families of alcoholics often have to deal with. They may have to give up many privileges due to the large amount of money spent on alcohol and also possible unemployment. Chances of domestic violence are also higher in such a family. Even if there is no domestic violence there is likely to be a higher degree of marital dissatisfaction and endless disagreements.

Experts believe that marital and family problems generally start primarily with the alcoholic, but they also believe that the spouse and children may contribute to his problem and make it worse. Denial is an essential problem for both alcoholics and their family members who often use denial as a means to rationalize his alcohol dependency. Every family loves and wants to protect its members and therefore denial is initially understandable. But beyond a point, denial affects the family members adversely. Often they lend a helping hand in perpetuating the problem, although they might do it only indirectly and unconsciously (Wekesser, 1994). They try to hide the problem, preserve the family's 'prestige' and project the image of a 'perfect family'. They often forget about their own needs and unknowingly become enablers. An enabler is a person who facilitates him to continue drinking.

The enablers help the alcoholic get out of the troubles caused by his drinking and often fabricate excuses and lies for him (Silverstein, 1990).

Often the spouse is hurt and upset by the repeated drinking episodes but is also the one who keeps the family together despite all the troubles caused by this behavior. This may then feed back resentment, bitterness, hurt and fear into the relationship and may become the source of provocation. The children in alcoholic families may also take on different roles (Wegscheider-Cruse, 1985). One child may take on the role of a *little caretaker*. This child takes care of the alcoholic, brings them drinks, cleans up after them and tides over stressful situations. The *family hero* tries to compensate for the father's drawbacks by making a special effort to be successful at school and work. The *scapegoat* diverts attention away from the alcoholic's behavior by acting out his anger; he may shout at the alcoholic father and may even hit him physically when he gets a chance. The *lost child* withdraws from family and social activities to escape the problem. The *family clown* brings comic relief to the family and is often the youngest child.

The alcoholic family does a little dance in which every member has a sequence of steps that are well practised and performed. The dance is repeated and this is what keeps the family together. Since the family ends up enabling the drinking behavior no one ever thinks of changing the sequence of steps in the dance. In such a family not only the alcoholic but all the family members need help.

Case Study

Pavan was an intelligent and handsome young boy just out of school and unwilling to go to college. He had found a well-paid job and was happy with it. Now, all he needed was a partner to complete his happiness. He did not have to wait too long. He spotted in the neighborhood a good-looking young girl whom he had never seen earlier. His curiosity led him to a conversation with her. Her name was Ranjana. She had a job which involved travel, and that is what had brought her here. Since her uncle's family lived here, she decided to stay with them. They found each other smart, witty and happy-go-lucky. They took each other's phone number and e-mail address. Soon they were exchanging e-mails and SMS messages, and enjoying each other's wit

and humor. Whenever Ranjana came to stay with her uncle, Pavan spent as much time with her as possible. It was only a matter of time before they concluded that they were made for each other. In spite of some initial parental opposition, they finally got married. After marriage they discovered that they were both spendthrifts and started picking on each other for frivolous expenses. Ranjana resented Pavan's drinking and he resented her phone bills. Further, they were staying with Pavan's parents and every evening Ranjana had several complaints about her mother-in-law. Pavan tried to plead with each warring faction but failed. Ranjana wanted Pavan to move out and live independently. He argued that it would then be difficult for them to make both ends meet. Ranjana agreed to change and guaranteed that she would stay within their means provided Pavan gave up drinking. Pavan thought he would never be able to do that and in any case he did not want to leave his parents because he felt responsible for them. The disharmony drove Pavan to drinking even more. What was to him earlier a mode of relaxation now became a means of forgetting his sorrows. His parents admonished him for drinking too much and held Ranjana responsible for it. The drinks increased their expenses so much that Pavan found ways of accepting money under the table at his workplace. That eased the financial situation a bit but added another dimension to his stress. The result was a vicious cycle: he drank because he was under stress and he was under greater stress because he drank. But knowing no other way to beat the stress, he drank even more. Under the influence of the drink he also became incoherent and abusive and a social embarrassment to his parents and Ranjana. Sometimes, when he was heavily drunk he also hit Ranjana. Since the drink had weakened him, she also hit back. In short, no one in the family felt life was worth living.

Discussion

Pavan found in Ranjana good company for a long chat, but forgot that real life involves much more. After marriage, he realized that his means were limited and also felt responsible for his parents. He could not understand why Ranjana could not be a little more understanding and adjust to the situation if she really loved him. He felt confident that he would be able to bring his drinking down to acceptable levels if only she cooperated with him.

Ranjana was equally infatuated by Pavan. She knew that he drank but that only made him appear smarter and she did not mind sharing a beer with him when they went on a date. But she did not visualize the full implications of life in a joint family. However, she was ready to adjust to the situation if only Pavan did not drink and if only he would agree to live independently. She could not understand why he could not agree to these two little things, if he really loved her. “After all, she had married him and not his parents. If she could leave her parents why couldn’t he”, she thought.

This case history again illustrates the importance of going over some crucial issues before marriage. It is also important that both the partners try to see each other in real life situations by spending enough time in each other’s home, and knowing the partner’s parents a bit. This is particularly important in India where family ties are strong and few children are able to sever the umbilical cord even after a love marriage.

Drinking is a common way of responding to stress but in the long run it always aggravates the stress. It is also difficult to understand how boys believe they are helping their parents by forcing them to stay in a house that resembles a battleground. In some situations, they may be able to do much more in time of real need if the couple stays separately. Distance avoids conflicts, the relations between the couple and their parents remain harmonious, and the couple is then happy to be available when the parents need them (and vice versa, for example, for baby sitting!).

When things have gone too far, as in this case, it might take a few years for the entire family to feel healed. But it may be possible to save the marriage if the couple moves out to set up a nuclear family and seeks professional help for their disharmonious relationship as well as Pavan’s drinking.

It is important to realize and accept that alcoholism is a disease. The family needs to learn as much as possible about it and its effects. Often families do not seek help because they are ashamed of washing their dirty linen in public. But in the process they end up feeling as if they are the only ones facing this problem. In fact, more families than one can imagine are affected by this deadly disease.

The belief that no one can help you unless you want to help yourself truly applies to an alcoholic. Alcoholics need to be motivated to give up

drinking and only then can they use the help they receive. There are rehabilitation centers that run recovery programs all over the country. A good program should address all aspects of recovery: the physical, mental, emotional, interpersonal and spiritual. The person can benefit from individual and group counseling as well as attending Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meetings in conjunction with medical and psychiatric services. Relapse prevention is a very important component in the treatment for alcohol addiction.

The alcoholic's family should also seek help in order to heal and bring their life back to some level of normalcy even if the alcoholic refuses to seek help. Al-Anon is a self-help group for families of alcoholics. The main goal of this organization is to help family members understand that they are not responsible for an alcoholic's drinking problems and that their own recovery does not depend upon the alcoholic's recovery. It is important for them to heal as well as to learn how not to enable the alcoholic's drinking behavior by denying the problem and lying to protect him. The entire family can benefit from family therapy after the alcoholic has sought individual help to quit drinking.



Extra-marital Affairs

Although extra-marital affairs are nearly universally looked down upon, in practice the picture is somewhat different because the very definition of an extra-marital affair is not clear-cut. If a person views pornography on the computer, would that be considered stepping outside the marriage? If a person seeks pleasure in the company of a colleague while attending an out-of-town meeting, would that be termed an affair? If a person has lunch in the office everyday with the same colleague of the opposite sex, they both enjoy it and feel something is amiss over the weekends when this opportunity is not available to them, would that be considered an affair? These questions have become important because in today's society when men and women work together they often develop a liking for a specific person of the opposite sex. They enjoy that person's company more than that of the spouse, at least

partly because it is much easier to stay pleasant when one does not have to deal with the day-to-day problems that complicate marital life. At the same time, being mature persons, they can stay within limits that are socially acceptable. In some cases, they may seek some safe relief from an unpleasant marriage. In such fuzzy cases it is for each individual and couple to decide what is considered crossing the boundary when it comes to their relationship.

Case Study

Rajat and Yukta had been married for fifteen years. They had two children. They had always lived in a joint family with Rajat's parents. There were no major issues between them. Rajat was in a mid-level government job. He shared the office with two colleagues. In a routine inter-departmental transfer a relatively young lady Disha, who had been married for five years, replaced one of his colleagues. Rajat brought his lunch to the office everyday and so did she. The three colleagues had lunch together as had been the practice for long. Rajat and Disha found each other's company rather pleasant and soon started talking about more intimate matters. Although Rajat had no major issues with his wife, their relationship had reached a stage where they did not really talk much to each other except about specific things. They had long stopped sharing details of the events of their day. Disha had some problems with her husband and in-laws, and relished giving Rajat a detailed account of the major events. It helped her get a load off her chest and finding in Rajat a mature person who had seen life, she thought his advice might improve her life. For Rajat it was a refreshing change to have a young lady sharing details of her life with him freely and depending upon him for advice. Soon, the lunch-time conversation started becoming so much of a dialogue between Rajat and Disha that their third colleague, also a lady, started feeling not only left out but uncomfortable. She started making an excuse to go out and have her lunch elsewhere. That left Rajat and Disha alone with each other during lunch and they seemed to enjoy it. The news of Rajat and Disha's intimacy with each other spread. But since they were not clearly violating any rules, no disciplinary action could be taken. However, to improve matters the boss intervened secretly and transferred Disha. That Rajat and Disha had become dependent on each other was now revealed by the fact that Disha still came to

have lunch with Rajat. It was further noticed that Rajat also sometimes left his desk to make an errand that was invariably in the direction of Disha's new office. They were frequently seen having tea together in the office canteen. Their partners were not aware of what was happening in the office, but they would eventually and their reaction is yet to be seen.

Discussion

Rajat and Disha probably still like to believe that they are just friends. They are just providing asexual companionship to each other. They meet each other only in the office. They do not let their relationship affect their family life.

When men and women work together it is natural that they would get friendly. As in all friendships, some are likely to be more intimate than others. It is also possible that in some cases the most intimate relationships would be between colleagues of the opposite sex. Further, it is natural for close friends to share some details of personal life and seek advice when necessary. However, when the relationship is between a man and a woman there are a few inevitable questions and complications. How much intimacy is permissible? Talking and having lunch together may be acceptable, but is touch also acceptable? If yes, how much touch and what type of touch is acceptable? There can be no universal answers to these questions, which would fit all societies. The really important question is whether the relationship is based primarily on sexual attraction and the rest of intimacy is an excuse to spend time together; or is the relationship based primarily on satisfying each other's asexual needs and the fact that they happen to be of opposite sex is purely incidental. In other words, is their relationship so fulfilling that they would be just as intimate even if they were of the same sex? If that were so, what would be the indicators? The strongest indicators are that in such acceptable cases the couple does not seek privacy and does not make special efforts to seek each other selectively and repeatedly. That is what makes Rajat and Disha's relationship suspect. They are happy if their third colleague leaves the room, leaving them alone. After Disha has been transferred they make special efforts to seek each other. Further, the frequency with which they seek each other every day seems to be on an increase.

It is quite possible that Rajat and Disha have the maturity to stay within socially acceptable limits so that they have a good time in the office, and their families also stay intact. But what is socially acceptable may not be acceptable to their families, and for a valid reason. Relationships like this are like drinking. Many people drink in moderation and are generally not a nuisance. But one never knows when they would be tempted to drink more, and the more they drink, the less control they have on when to stop. Similarly, in spite of the maturity and self-control that Rajat and Disha might have, there is always the risk of becoming more and more intimate till they discover that they cannot live without each other. Once they have reached that stage, whether their families know about it and how they react to it would hardly matter to them. Deep under the water a person is incapable of evaluating the implications of drowning.

All over the world, including in India, men are more likely to have extra-marital affairs as compared to women. The reasons for this are many and the justification, if any, is controversial. The biopsychosocial perspective makes the argument that men are genetically more likely to be unfaithful because of an evolutionary predisposition to fertilize as many female eggs as possible. Women, on the other hand, are genetically engineered to avoid casual sex because pregnancy and delivery make rather heavy demands on them (Lamanna & Riedmann, 2006). Research has consistently found that women invest more than men in marriage, 'the relationship'.

Extra-marital affairs begin for a variety of reasons and the reason determines whether the affair is a short or a long-term one. Short-term affairs may be motivated by a need for either conquest or revenge. Men are more likely to be driven by the need for conquest and women by the need to take revenge (Lamanna & Riedmann, 2006). Long-term affairs may be an effort to get what is missing in the marriage. If the affair remains secret or is overlooked by the spouse, it may actually turn out to be a marriage-maintenance affair. Some affairs seem to aim at intimacy-reduction. If one partner feels smothered by a very high level of intimacy in the marriage an affair may be a way of restoring balance. Some affairs may be driven by a need to feel reassured. A middle-aged man may have an affair with a younger woman to prove his youthfulness. Such an affair may trap an unsuspecting girl who

initially looks upon the relationship as a harmless and friendly resource for guidance and mature conversation.

There are different ways in which affairs may be discovered. In some cases, the person having the affair may actually tell the partner about it. But in most cases either the partner who is being betrayed discovers some tell-tale signs of the affair or someone tells them about it. The betrayed partner may choose to confront the spouse or may decide to let the spouse continue believing that the affair is a secret.

An extra-marital affair has many unpleasant consequences. First and foremost it is a breach of trust. It is likely to leave the cheated partner feeling hurt and violated as well as shocked and angry. The betrayed partner is likely to feel jealous of the person whom his/her partner now seems to like more. Women and men generally react differently to feelings of jealousy. Women are more likely to try and change so as to please their partner. Men on the other hand, are more likely to seek solace in alternative relationships. It is important to remember that this is a generalization and will not be true for everybody.

Some marriages may be able to survive an affair and others may not. That largely depends on how much the couple is really interested in saving the marriage. It is difficult to save the marriage if the partner who cheated is deeply committed to the new-found love or if the cheated partner is absolutely unwilling to forgive. However, if the partner who cheated regrets what happened, apologizes and is ready to try and make the relationship work, and the other partner is ready to forgive, the marriage is more likely to survive. Both the partners have to rebuild their trust in the relationship for it to survive.

Couples affected by extra-marital affairs can benefit from marital counseling. The therapist can help them evaluate their relationship. The point is whether the affair is a one-time aberration in an otherwise healthy marriage, or is the proverbial last straw that broke the camel's back. If the couple decides to remain together, counseling can facilitate the process of forgiveness and reconciliation and help the couple develop a balanced view of their relationship. If the couple decides to move on separately, the

counselor can help them part in a way that causes the least amount of pain and hurt to both parties.



Coping with an Illness

A chronic illness, physical or mental, can put a lot of stress on a marriage. The couple may be forced to deal with issues of communication, role reallocation, social isolation and threatened loss (Rolland, 1994). The partner who is well may have to assume the responsibilities of the ill partner in addition to their own responsibilities, along with the other stressors imposed on the family by the illness. The role changes may force the couple to change their lifestyle, which may contribute to their isolation and loneliness and the healthy partner's sense of dissatisfaction. The physical symptoms and negative mood of the patient and his need for emotional and physical support can be extremely taxing for his partner. In turn, the partner's attitude can have a strong influence on the patient's psychological adjustment to the illness, the quality of management and the rate of recovery from the illness. Due to this, the healthy partner may feel guilty because of his/her feelings of disappointment, anger and resentment. These are all potential problems in a family faced with chronic illness, but they are not inevitable. Some partners can cheerfully endure long periods of a lifestyle that has been modified to suit the illness out of a sense of duty. A few can go a step further and grow spiritually through such an experience.

Case Study

Jharna was an idealistic young girl who wanted to use her life to raise adopted orphans rather than marry and have her own children. But she succumbed to relentless parental pressure and finally gave in to an arranged marriage. It was soon discovered that her husband Chetan had long been on medication for depression, a fact that had been hidden by his family. After an initial reaction of anger at having been cheated, she reconciled to the situation. She wanted to look after orphans; here God had sent her a grown-up orphan to be taken care of. Although her husband had a family they did not need him. In that sense,

he was an orphan in need of care. Destiny had given the responsibility of his care to his wife. Having accepted her destiny positively, she started enjoying the delight of showering unconditional love on Chetan without expecting anything in return. Not only did she find fulfillment in the marriage, Chetan's depression also improved.

Discussion

This is a perfect example of a bad marriage with a good conclusion. Destiny brought together a man who had been starved of love for a long time and a woman who could look upon him as one who gave her the opportunity of fulfilling her need for giving love. Happiness does not depend upon events; it depends on how we look at them. Looking at adverse events positively is always possible if we look at them in terms of the spiritual worldview.

Expectation about provision of care may differ for men and women with traditional gender roles. Since women are socialized to be the caretakers, the situation may be much worse if the woman is the patient. That may call for a reversal of roles and the woman may find it difficult to be taken care of. Correspondingly, it may be difficult for the man to step into the role of the caregiver because it is unfamiliar territory for him. But such crises in our lives propel us into doing things that we may not be otherwise used to. Such a situation may break gender stereotypes and help people to get in touch with a part of themselves that they were not aware of.

The marital relationship can be affected due to the illness of a close member in the extended family as well. If a parent-in-law has a chronic illness it can be stressful for the entire family besides the patient. Such a family needs to get together and talk so that each member knows how the others perceive the situation. This helps them to cope with the illness and also maintains healthy communication within the family, which makes it easier to go through the inevitable period of uncertainty. If necessary, the help of a mental health professional might be sought to guide and assist this process.

Often families coping with a chronic illness feel very isolated. It is helpful to connect with others in the community who are coping with a similar situation in order to learn from them and share experiences. Getting more

information about the illness from a reliable source and a list of resources available in the community can be very helpful.

Families tend to put aside their plans and priorities when confronted with a chronic illness. Medical family therapy can help the family redefine themselves in light of the illness. They can reestablish their goals and identity as a family, putting the illness into perspective without letting it completely overshadow everything else in their lives. A discussion on roles and responsibilities can be initiated. The family may need to think creatively about new behaviors, which will allow them to achieve a better balance between looking after the member who is ill and the needs of the other members.

In case of a terminal illness the family may be reluctant to discuss their feelings of loss. A mental health professional can initiate questions about loss and help the family cope in the face of it.



Closing Thoughts

It is very easy to analyze problems but solving them is only a little more difficult if the problems belong to somebody else; what is really difficult is to solve our own problems. This book has indulged in only the first two rather easy exercises. However, you may have realized that there is no situation that has no potential problem. The good news however, is that there is no problem which cannot be solved through love and understanding. Further, the book may also help the reader prevent potential problems at many levels such as choosing a partner with care, choosing the partner's family with only a little less care, and realizing that happy family life is basically about striking the right balance between stability and progress, fostering individual growth and nurturing relationships, self-giving and assertion. Further, it needs to be acknowledged that problems cannot be solved unless one is prepared to meet more than half way. Finally, there is no substitute for sincerity—whatever needs to be done, has to be done with total sincerity. No matter what we say or pretend, others understand what we really mean.



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