

Letters to Manushi

The Real Issue

This is being written as a rejoinder to the article by Madhu Kishwar on love and arranged marriages in *Manushi* 80. Firstly, I am surprised that it has been carried in *Manushi* as it seems more like an article that would appear in one of the mainstream magazines. I would like to critique the piece on two grounds: on its content and argument; and on the methodology and data. The article seeks to analyse whether love marriages (or as she refers to them, "self-arranged" marriages) have been more successful than "family arranged" marriages and where the self-arranged marriages have gone wrong. Clearly this is a very tricky ground as it is difficult to define what a successful marriage is. But the article does not tackle this problem at all and proceeds on the presumption that there are some objective criteria on which to judge a marriage. Keeping a marriage together is seen as the most important value. Thus her strongest criticism of self-arranged marriages is that they lack parental support and, therefore, when things go wrong the woman is left high and dry. But there is no basis on which she concludes that this is a fact as no evidence (barring a few case studies of people she knows) is given. On the flip side of this is the presumption that in family-arranged marriages, women are provided support in times of trouble. She does not admit that even in these cases women are given very little support.

There is also no mention of which class of women she is talking about.

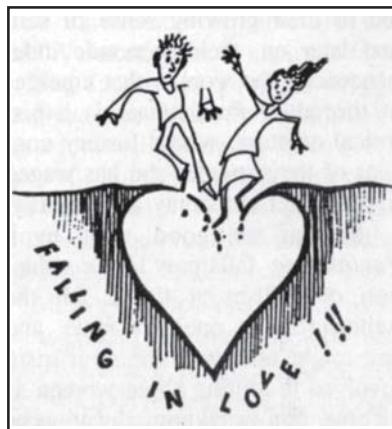
There is no dearth of marital violence today in any type of marriage and one just has to open a newspaper to read the gory details. Clearly family support in these cases has not been really able to protect women. The author herself accepts that very few families will take their daughters back even if they are in abusive marriages.

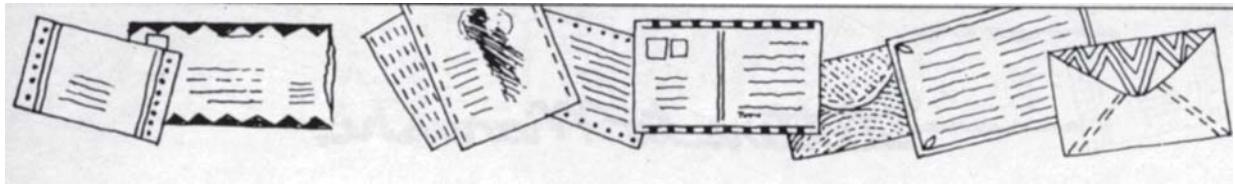
But the focus of the article is not on this, but on how family support can help keep marriages together. I am not questioning the truth of this statement, but whether this can be seen as a value by itself. Is this really the issue at stake? Hasn't the women's movement in its campaign of domestic violence found that keeping the marriage together is very often not really in the best interests of women, but is done for the honour of the family? Women often have to stay on in oppressive marriages because they perceive no choice. And very often because the two families are working very hard to keep the marriage from falling apart. How can the author take such a simplistic view of marriage? She does not mention that in such a society women are

forced to stay in abusive marriages and that divorce is seen as a stigma. All she has to say as justification is that men too face stigma if they are divorced.

Another shortcoming of the article is that the author does not even make clear which strata, caste, class, religion, and age group she is talking about. She is constantly making broad generalisations without serious substantiation, save for the few examples of people who are to represent "Indians". The article is completely unsociological as it is at no point stated who she is talking about and how she comes to these conclusions. She also makes generalisations and very stereotypical statements about women's and men's nature. For example, she presumes that a woman who chooses her own partner will naturally "fall in love" with another man if he has more to offer her materially. It is dangerous when a writer of Madhu Kishwar's stature portrays such negative stereotypes as established facts. Again the portrayal of love marriages is dramatic and stereotypical as in Hindi films. She also presumes that all love or self-arranged marriages are done against parental wishes.

Whatever the type of marriage, women can find themselves in oppressive or abusive situations. Thus the real issue is the nature of the institution of marriage in a patriarchal culture like India and not the merits or demerits of love or arranged marriage. Certainly there is a need today to study the changing Indian family. We need to understand





what are the factors causing change and also to evaluate the change within a historical and sociological perspective. This has to be done in a serious and systematic manner and cannot be based on impressions. One has also to be very careful in making any generalisations about such a large and diverse population. It is also important to recognise that there are alternatives to marriage and that, in fact, there are many people all over the world who are living in different situations and we cannot deny the experiences of people who may not form part of the dominant culture. Thus any work on marriage and family should take all these factors into consideration and has to be done seriously. It is not ethical for **Manushi** to publish such an unsubstantiated piece especially on an issue which touches all our lives in such an intimate way.

Kalpana Viswanath, New Delhi

My article does not claim to be based on anything more than the experience and impressions I have gathered over years of working with women. Learning from life's experience is as valid a way of understanding our society as is learning through research studies and surveys. I am neither opposed to self-arranged marriages, nor do I project the family-arranged marriages as an ideal. I also do not presume that self-arranged marriages need always be against parental wishes. Nor that they will inevitably be unsuccessful.

I personally am not at all enamoured with marriage and have

chosen to stay single. Therefore, keeping marriages going at all cost is not my agenda. However, my experience of working with women tells me that most women in India are desperate to cling to their marriages, even bad ones.

For the woman who considers survival and stability of her marriage important, my advice would be that she should try to win over the support of both her natal and her marital families. I am convinced that the lack of such support tends to make women's lives extremely vulnerable to abuse.

Madhu Kishwar

Different Traditions

I have been very impressed by your article *Love and Marriage* in **Manushi** 80. I quite often find that different conceptions of marriage are among the obstacles in mutual understanding between the East and the West. Purely parent-arranged marriages are an exoticism for European's while I have found many times that for common Indians the same type of exoticism is the fact that we do not arrange our children's marriages.

In fact, parent arranged marriages are the rule in the whole of Asia in various modifications and, with deviations, while love marriages or "self-arranged marriages" as you aptly call them are the norm in the West. Even in those cases where there is no question of love there must be a talk about something like love at least, a semblance, a pretence. Basically this has always been the case in Europe,

even in parent-arranged marriages that occurred, in particular in the upper strata of the society, in the past. There were class barriers, there might have been parental opposition in certain cases, but arranged marriages were not a must. A son or a daughter was expected to make a proper choice. The traditions are different. But why? One explanation may be that Christianity was never concerned with marriage and family to the extent Eastern religions are. Marriage was never a duty for a Christian, so it was not regarded necessary to arrange it at any cost.

Dagmar Markova, Czech Republic

Women and Livestocks

I read the article by Sagari Ramdas *Women and Livestock* in **Manushi** 76 with much interest. I have some experience in the field. I have worked on the impact of an Indo-Swiss Project in some villages of Kerala. I am not a veterinary doctor, I am trained in sociology. I have been living in a village for the last five years and I find, from my observations and investigations, that Artificial Insemination (AI) technology used on animals here is inefficient, wasteful and quite unnecessary.

The failure rate is so high that its entire purpose seems to be to keep the veterinarians going rather than to give us really high yielding cows. After using AI techniques a few times, most farmers settle for "natural service". But most veterinarians swear by AI and feel that in spite of its low rate of success it is worth the trouble. And it is really quite a lot of trouble to breed bulls and cows on

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special farms, to collect the se-men, to freeze it, to distribute it, to inseminate at the precise time when the cow is in the middle of her period. It's too much of an effort and expense, there are too many ifs and buts—all for the poor cow to get inseminated to bear a "good" calf (disease free and with high yielding potential)! Apart from raising the milk yield potential, it is also for preventing venereal diseases among cows. I want to know Sagari's views on it. Are the cows so prone to VD if they go for natural insemination instead of AI? Even if it is so, can it not be tackled in some other way? Is the AI worthwhile in spite of its drawbacks?

Uma Shankari,

Vill. Venkatramapuram, A.P.

Sagari Ramdas replies:

There is nothing wrong with AI technology per se—the problem is one of the use of this technology under very specific Indian rural conditions, where owners have to travel long distances with their animals to reach the nearest AI centre. The technique has been developed in the West, to suit organised dairy farming conditions. It included constant checking for estrus by herdsmen/ owners as a regular managemental practice, vets/ technicians going to the dairy to inseminate the animals, training of owners to do AI and provision of all the AI equipment on their farms and efficient system of monitoring of non-return cases.

Under organised dairy farm conditions in India, where vets visit farms for insemination of animals,

regular supervision, and checking for estrus, we find high conception rates (75%) with low returns. The following are some of the reasons for relatively low conception rates with AI under Indian rural conditions:» Producers/ owners have to travel long distances to reach the nearest AI centre to get their animals inseminated and often reach after the critical time for insemination is over. Animals who come to heat in the morning must be inseminated in the afternoon; those in the evening, the following morning. Producers might not always be free on that day to travel all the distance, as dairying for most farmers is one of the many related activities she/he is involved with.

*Producers reach the AI station to find the technician missing/on leave/ sick etc.

*Lack of specific knowledge about estrus signs and ideal time to inseminate.

*Animals in new surroundings are tense/stressed.

*The work is handled by inexperienced technicians, without necessary back up, supervision and monitoring.

*If not properly stored under liquid nitrogen conditions, the frozen semen is of poor quality.

Under such conditions there are many more chances of human error resulting in poor conception rates. So why then AI at all? A few advantages are:

*Quality semen of power bulls of desired breed are made available to producers without their having to rear the bull in the village.

*It is an effective method of

preventing the spread of VD, provided the frozen semen is itself disease free and additional control and monitoring of female animals is done simultaneously.

AI is not a foolproof way to control and prevent VD. The following additional precautions must be taken:

*Regular screening of all animals and bulls who have reached puberty, for signs/symptoms of any VD diseases

*Culling of strong scrub bulls and infected bulls

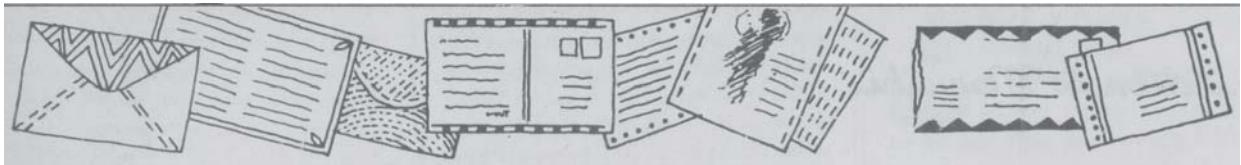
*Treatment/culling of affected animals.

If AI has to yield higher conception rates in rural Indian conditions, the following urgent steps need to be taken:

*Provision for "AI at the doorstep", that is, train a woman from the village, who can carry out AI, for the village itself, so that farmers do not have to travel miles to reach the AI centre. The local village AI Inseminator-cum-Animal Health Worker can provide this service at the owner's house. Regular monitoring, supervision and follow up training for the village level AI technician by the local veterinarian. AI services should be paid for.

*Education and information to producers especially regarding estrus signs and when to inseminate the animal.

This will take time and till then, villages which are really finding it difficult to reach the nearest AI station would be well advised to have quality breeding bulls in the village itself. They need to be managed and reared



by interested persons/groups. This is feasible for buffalo bulls, Indian breeds of cattle, but questionable for exotic crossbreeds. To maintain pure exotic Jerseys/HFs under Indian rural conditions is extremely cost ineffective. The producers should also be trained regarding estrus. Besides, there are other issues like the link up of AI to the current breeding strategies for different agroeco conditions.

Dowry Calculations

I enjoyed reading your thoughtful article *Dowry Calculations* in **Manushi** 78, and would like to congratulate you for providing a refreshingly new perspective on the dowry system. However, I am not sure that getting a share in the parental property would necessarily improve women's economic standing. It can be mathematically shown rather easily

that, assuming that husbands and wives own their properties jointly, the total financial assets of married women, overall, would remain identical irrespective of whether the properties are divided amongst the brothers only or the sisters also are given equal share. *(See box)*

As long as men, be they husbands, fathers or brothers, solely control the financial resources, the women will continue to play the role of economic second fiddle no matter how much wealth they might carry in their names. The major thrust of women's movement should be towards achieving their rights to use, dispose of, allocate or manage the property to the same extent as those given to men. Without these rights, no matter what system of distribution of property is followed, economic equality of women would remain elusive.

It is of course possible that most women are quite happy with the way things are, or at least are not unhappy enough, to want to go through the hassles of trying to bring about a change. In the USA, for example, the Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution, which sought to extend equal rights of women, failed to be ratified and some of its most vocal opponents were women themselves. Does a parallel exist in India too? After all, financial dependence does provide security and freedom from the anxieties and stresses of making decisions, taking risks and facing the consequences thereof.

Realistically, equal rights will not be handed over to the women on a

W (1) = Total wealth of a married couple when the parental wealth is divided only amongst the brothers, and the sisters get nothing

W (2) = Total wealth of a married couple when the parental wealth is divided equally amongst the brothers and sisters

W(h) = Wealth of the husband's family

W(w) = Wealth of the wife's family

Bh = Number of the husband's brothers

Bw = Number of the wife's brothers

Sh = Number of the husband's sisters

Sw = Number of the wife's sisters

If the property is divided only amongst the brothers

Then $W(1) = W(h) / B(h)$(1)

and if the property is divided equally between brothers and sisters

Then $W(2) = W(h) / (Bh + Sh) + W(w) / (Bw + Sw)$(2)

Subtracting (1) from (2) we get :-

$$\begin{aligned}
 & W(h) / (Bh + Sh) + W(w) / (Bw + Sw) - W(h) / Bh \\
 & = \frac{W(w)Bh(Bh + Sh) + W(h)Bh(Bw + Sw) - W(h)(Bh + Sh)(Bw + Sw)}{(Bw + Sw)(Bh + Sh)Bh} \\
 & = \frac{W(w)BhBh + W(w)BhSh - W(h)BwSh - W(h)ShSw}{(Bw + Sw)(Bh + Sh)Bh} \\
 & = \frac{W(w)Bh(Bh + Sh) - W(h)Sh(Bw + Sw)}{(Bw + Sw)(Bh + Sh)Bh}
 \end{aligned}$$

Therefore :-

$W(2) > W(1)$ if $W(w) \cdot Bh(Bh + Sh) > W(h) \cdot Sh(Bw + Sw)$(3)

and

$W(2) < W(1)$ if $W(w) \cdot Bh(Bh + Sh) < W(h) \cdot Sh(Bw + Sw)$(4)

As (3) and (4) are equally likely to occur in a given community of society, instances when $W(2)$ would be greater than $W(1)$ will equal the instances when $W(1)$ would be greater than $W(2)$. Therefore $W(2)$ will equal $W(1)$ when all instances are considered together although individual instances may fall under one or the another of these inequalities.

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silver platter. Never in history have economic rights been achieved in this fashion. It will take a struggle and, like all struggles, will demand a price. However, if women do, in fact, want equal rights and are willing to pay the price, then they are not as helpless as we make them out to be. It should not be ignored that women are not only the recipients of wealth but are also producers of it. Amongst the labour classes, women are financially more autonomous compared to the so called middle or upper class women, not because they inherit much wealth but

because they are actively involved in its generation. Even in the middle and upper classes, women are in fact gaining greater financial power as more and more of them are joining the work force and generating independent income. The change is of course painfully slow but is perceptible.

Economic equality for women would be achieved through education, acquisition of saleable skills, joining the workplace, generating income, and then having the courage and confidence to face

the stresses, uncertainties and anxieties of financial independence. With greater financial autonomy the question of sharing in the family property would also be resolved more equitably even under the existing laws as women would no longer lie the passive recipients waiting for a "handout but will be recognised as producers of wealth. This is the only practical course of action which holds the promise of economic and financial equality for women.

**Kumar Ashutosh, New York,
U.S.A.**