



Snuffing out love

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Born with innocence, strong socialization moulds human beings to certain cultures. The need to not deviate from societal norms can ruin many a cross-cultural love relationship.

The amazing number of sincere responses to my column on digital technology adding salt to love wounds tells me the problem is dire. Firstly, thank you my readers for connecting to my writing and permitting me to use your personal experiences. You are proving that it's not just traditional caste, different states, languages, food habits or innocent Facebook appearances that put spokes into intimate marriage bonding. Look at the numerous weird reasons you have revealed to me of how love marriages can be blocked, snuffing happiness out.

Tech-savvy astrologer: A civil servant's son and daughter of a family of engineers have been unable to marry for 3 years because of an astrologer's negativity. These erudite families are evading decision-making responsibility by consulting an astrologer to determine marriage compatibility. It seems disbelieving or contradicting the astrologer is not an option because he uses the latest gadgets and apps to predict situations. Nor is it possible to bribe him, as is a common occurrence in such circumstances, because he's a family member. The point I'm making here considers far-reaching consequences. Entrepreneurship is already lacking amongst our educated

classes, by believing in such filters for children's happiness we immobilize everyone. Instead of taking confident steps in life we make ourselves dependent on soothsayers, others who flex power muscles, or untoward beliefs in planetary movements we cannot control.

Antibiotic for digital woes: Having astronomical problems for marriage doesn't mean there's no solution if you visit the right godman. Watch out digital technology! Meet your match in a Baba who claims to remove "the negative impact that Internet has on young boys and girls." In Mumbai's suburban railway service which 7.5 million commuters use to come to work every day, this Baba advertises a cure for any digital technology problem people have. I'm sure many get convinced with such an antibiotic because a Baba plays a magical role in India.

Religious ricochet: An MNC executive said she's had two different affairs at different times with non-Muslims who later confided they did not propose to her because their families were opposed to inter-religion unions. In her Muslim family, marrying outside the sect is considered a crime where all ties between the family and couple are severed. Her uncle arranged his daughter's marriage to a Bora Muslim, so his extended family of Sunni Muslims ostracised them. When his other daughter fell in love with a Christian, her uncle insisted he convert to Islam. Even then his extended family boycotted him, stopped him from coming for prayers and will possibly disallow his burial in the community burial ground later. When another niece of this executive confided she had a Punjabi Hindu boyfriend, she excitedly offered to help them

marry, but the niece declared, "I don't plan to marry him. I will just go around with him until I can, and then get married to the guy my mother finds."

Clan clash: That two 24-year-olds chose to marry is a big ego-punch for the girl's parents and brother who consider it their birthright to choose her life-partner. Belonging to the same 96 Kuli Maratha clans with different surnames, they've known each other since childhood and are waiting 8 years for permission to marry. He's a responsible multinational company manager. Her parents threatened to make his life hell unless she stopped talking to him. He's desperately looking for advice for his next move. Forget everything to get peace or defy her parents with a registered marriage?

Bold steps win: The powerful testimony of another reader who wrote about his 46 years of happy inter-caste, interstate love marriage is a great lesson for our horrible, human-made rituals. "Dear Shombit, It was a great pleasure reading your column in Indian Express. You took me personally back to late sixties. I'm Maharashtrian CKP; my wife a Gujarati Baniya, a shade lower in Hindu caste system. We met at GS Medical College, Mumbai. Fell in love. Decided to marry and then faced more or less the same obstacles as your friend's brother... except for FaceBook. We are in active medical practice, I'm a very senior (78 years) Gynaecologist and my wife, younger by nearly 5 years, a well-known ENT surgeon. We went to UK to get our Fellowships from respective Royal Colleges of Surgeons. Our marriage has wonderfully lasted for such a happy and prosperous long time only because we had to fight extremely hard against the firmly entrenched social norms like caste, community and silly inhibitions of the feelings of near relatives in match-making. Please tell your friend's brother to go ahead with his plan to marry his beloved and face the world boldly for what they are doing should be strictly their own business. We both wholeheartedly wish them the

best, Dr. Arvind Pradhan, Dombivali."

Hijacked! A reader from UP who's had a love marriage with a Bengali, narrated how parents try to own proprietorship over their treasured boys. She said when her 80-year-old father-in-law meets his brothers, they invariably talk of how their sons were "hijacked" into love marriages. After 15 years of marriage into this joint family where she affectionately nurtures her in-laws, her only choice is to express amusement at the hijacking metaphor.

Meddling with human emotion, our most valuable intangible asset, can be quite disconcerting. To not hurt parents, young adults illogically conform: "If I fall in love, I will fall in love with a person of my religion, caste and creed." Virtual matrimony sites help find dates and spouses, but opposition to love marriages continues in many families. Astrologers provide scientific backup to stop the happiness of people in love, anti-Internet Babas veer us away from opening the windows of the mind, the evils of child marriage or forced social marriage continue. Do nosey relatives and co-conspirators create stodgy social dogma for couples to lead a life without emotion?

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