

# MATRIMONIAL

**wanted brides**

**wanted grooms**

**wanted brides**

**wanted grooms**

**wanted grooms**

**WANTED:**  
**More men like them!**  
**Meet the Galahads who**  
**responded to a 'widow's'**  
**matrimonial ad.**

By Vinati Tikku

On the 23rd of January, 1983, an unusual matrimonial advertisement appeared in The Times of India. Even in the sea of print it stood out for its terseness and bold approach. Among the hundreds of other cloying requests for 'I.A.S./Engineer boys' and 'horoscope first instance' its demand for 'a liberal, broadminded spouse', was a little rattling. And regular readers of matrimonial columns may have been a bit surprised to find a carefree 'caste/religion no bar' instead of the usual 'Gotra Kashyap' nonsense. All the intriguing advertisement said was 'Widow, 28, no children, doctor, attractive, intelligent. Seeks an understanding, broadminded spouse. Caste, religion no bar.'

Meanwhile, we at 'Celebrity' kept our fingers crossed and waited for the replies to come in. Ever since the idea of putting in a fictitious matrimonial advertisement on behalf of a widow had been mooted the magazine office had come to resemble the share market on a particularly busy day. Everyone pitched in with his/her ideas on the subject and at competitive decibel levels, naturally. While heated arguments on professional ethics and confidential cor-

respondence raged on, I became increasingly sure of one thing — inserting this ad, was the only sure-fire way of gauging genuine reactions to widow re-marriage. Once I was convinced of that, there was no backtracking. Whatever podium pundits and 'Prem Rog' might say about widow re-marriage, it is the men who actually offer to marry a widow who count. Not widowers wanting someone to look after children from a previous marriage, but bachelors.

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Single men who could marry convent educated, tall, slim, fair virgin khatri or whatever girls, but won't. In other words, single and eligible men who might respond to the advertisement.

The first surprise was the staggering amount of mail we received in response to

the ad. To think that six, barely readable lines buried in acres of similar print could trigger off enough mail to keep me busy sorting out letters for the better part of a month is indeed surprising. (See Box for statistical details.) Another surprise was that an overwhelming majority of the respondents — 76.5 per cent — were bachelors. Instead of the rare gem I had somewhat naively expected to unearth, here were hundreds (yes, literally hundreds) of eligible single men wanting to marry a widow! My early enthusiasm was replaced by a dampening sense of guilt as I watched the letters pour in and slowly swell the file I had euphemistically marked 'Survey'. I began to wonder how I was going to break it to them. Most of the letters were clearly sincere. They were written by men who had bared their bio-datas and souls to a woman they wanted to marry. *Panic. What was I, journalistic voyeur, doing in the middle of all this?*

At one point I even toyed with the idea of playing along, meeting some of the respondents in the role of the 'widow'. I thought that was the only way I could get to meet any of them. I doubted they would agree to a journalistic inquisition after being told the truth about the advertisement. They might even resent the intrusion on their privacy. But something — I like to think it was innate decency — held me back. I finally decided to write to a few Bombay-based respondents, confessing all. That the widow didn't exist. That we were a magazine interested in the subject of widow re-marriage. That we appreciated their gesture in offering to marry a widow. That we would treat their letters in absolute confidence, but if they'd like to be interviewed on the subject and didn't mind going public with the whole thing, could they please drop in at the office on any working day between 10 am and 5 pm, please.

My 'suitors', as they came to be known in the office turned out to be truly broad-minded men. They forgave my professional intrigue and bravely agreed to bare their souls all over again. This time for public consumption. Meet them:



**"Becoming a widow in this country is like Paradise Lost. I want to help someone regain paradise!"**

**Kirti Kumar:** In his bright red shirt, the bamboozled Kumar hardly looks the part of a man who has nobly offered to marry a widow. But he's dead serious. "It's not a widow's fault that she has lost her husband," he points out. Being an ex-serviceman he is particularly empathetic towards widows and talks of the many hapless war-widows he's known. His poetic imagery is a little inappropriate but the man's sincere. "Becoming a widow in this country is like Paradise Lost. I want to help someone regain paradise!"



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**Dr. Sunil Parvatkar:** He had sent his photograph along with a painstakingly drafted bio-data so it was easy to recognise him! "I was fobbed-gated," he exclaimed almost as soon as he walked into our office. "I never doubted the authenticity of the ad. But I appreciate the idea. You will get a more genuine idea by interviewing those who have applied for the ad, then by having an armchair discussion on the subject."

Dr. Parvatkar comes from an orthodox, middle-class Maharashtrian family. His father was "an incorruptible hence poor" central government officer. A national scholar during his student days, Dr. Parvatkar has always been somewhat of a rebel. He recently chucked up a steady government job as medical officer in charge of the Telecom factory in Dvnar because of the monotony involved. "And

that was before I got my present assignment," he reveals airily. He will be leaving for Iraq shortly where he will work as an expert on industrial health hazards. In fact he had responded to the matrimonial ad with a view to marrying before he left the country.

Did he respond because the woman in question was a doctor or because she was a widow? Dr. Parvatkar is blunt in his reply. "I was interested because she was a doctor — the fact that she was a widow didn't matter. Just because she was married before doesn't mean that she has to be devalued. Our society is not a culturally evolved society and it is sad that this prejudice towards widows exists. I believe marriage should be based on intense liking and rapport between two individuals. Nothing else matters."

How was he going to convince his conservative family of that? "My parents have my happiness at heart. It would not have been difficult to convince them," he replied confidently.

Dr. Parvatkar's idea of a liberated woman is one who takes her own decisions and he has only one word for traditional arranged marriages — "Ridiculous."



**"Life doesn't stop when someone dies," declares Mahesh with a shy smile, "and I'd definitely like my wife to remarry if I were to die. So why should I have anything against a widow?"**

**Mahesh Shivdasani:** is a tall, shy man whose awkwardness is multiplied many times by his long, gangly limbs. His feeble protest as he walks in is "But I've never been interviewed before except for my job!" Shivdasani works for a private pharmaceutical company called Pharma Remedies. His parents, he says, have been the real trend-setters. His father, a Sindhvi who

came to Bombay during the partition, set up an electrical goods shop at Nana Chowk and married a Christian girl living in the same building.

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His parents are absolutely open-minded. "Bring anyone to the house but treat her with respect, they tell me," says Shivdasani with quiet pride. "I'm absolutely against dowry. I'd like my wife to come to my house with a single saree and no jewellery. Her parents have taken enough trouble to raise her." He'd like to marry someone who is "average looking but well-educated." He has no qualms about marrying a divorcee either though he'd like to know the reason for the divorce.



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**Dr. Chandrakant Lotlikar:** is a mild-mannered middle-aged man whose genial exterior hides a steely determination to do things his way. His unconventional ideas were formed early in life. As a student he excelled at sports. "I used to find it strange even then that my family objected to people on the grounds of religion when Hindu, Muslims and Christians were all equal on the playing field," he remembers with a mellow smile. A first class M.Com from Nagpur University, he went to the University of Southern California to do an M.A. in Economics. In 1964, when he was offered the Presidency of the Indian Students Union in America he refused it saying, "we have left our country to become part of America, not to create little Gujaratis and Punjabis here." He went

on to get a Ph.D. in Applied Economics from Zurich, Switzerland (which explains the 'Dr.' in his name) and later returned to America to lecture at various universities. He is now settled in India and lives off his investments quite comfortably. He plans to write books, "which no one will dare publish," including one on corruption in high places and another on Muslims in India.

Given his iconoclastic background, it is only natural that he takes the truth about the matrimonial ad. in his stride. "It came as a very pleasant surprise," he assures me "I was glad that some magazine actually took the trouble to get a genuine response to this subject. Ours is an absolutely hypocritical and male-oriented society. Women should be more militant. Perhaps education is the answer. I don't know.

Sometimes I'm quite pessimistic about this issue. Our country is slow to move, whether it be repairing a road or repairing society." Dr. Lotia himself wants his wife to be a good friend and thinks that marriage to a widow is bound to succeed because she is more likely to be mature. "A widow with a child would be even better." He says as a parting shot.

## The Males behind the Mail. Who were they?



A total of 207 replies were received in response to the advertisement. Of these, 7 were from watchful rival matrimonial agencies offering their services! A statistical analysis of the remainder revealed that:

- 66 per cent of the respondents were Hindus. (The advertisement clearly stated caste/religion no bar.)

- 15.5 per cent were Muslims.

- Another 15.5 per cent were Christians.

- The remaining 3 per cent were lumped together under the broad category of 'Others' which included Parsis and Jews.

- The respondents were quite well-padded financially. Only 16 per cent admitted to a monthly income of less than Rs.1,000. 38.5 per cent wrote that they earned between Rs.1,000 and Rs.2,000 a month. And 45.5 per cent claimed to have a monthly income of Rs.2,000 and above.

- Another surprise finding was that 76.5 per cent of the men wanting to marry the widow were bachelors. Only 6.5 per cent were widowers and 17 per cent were divorcees.

- Only one letter requested that the girl's horoscope be sent.

- As always it was the human aspect that proved most interesting. The letters, often fumbling attempts at introductions, were sometimes unwittingly funny. Excerpts:

*"Like others I also drink, but the difference is that I drink with my eyes."*

*"Can you give details of your first marriage — but if it hurts, don't write anything. It's O.K."*

*"As one soul in search of another, as a wounded, scarred and marred one drifting along, probably, in hopeful search of anointing peace and solace, and, an island of balm; if things shape well and crystallise God's will, if they don't click, let it all melt away like dew before the sun."*

*"I possess clear and sharp masculine features and a standing height of 188 cms. with excellent mental and*

*physical strength inclusive of genetic/sexual strength."*

*"I am very fair by Indian standards. My friends are of the opinion that I am better looking than most Hindi film actors."*

*"I am unemployed but please do not treat me like an untouchable. You must be aware how difficult it is to get a job nowadays."*

*"In your reply letter, please convey the reason for your widowhood and about your mother tongue, family and if any bizarre behaviour. Please also mention about all other matters not queried here."*

*"I want a sincere, fashionless life-partner."*

*"I wanted to remain a bachelor but now I have been ordained by saints to set up as a householder hence I am responding to your ad. My spiritualism combined with your medical talent*

*may ease tensions and misery among fellow beings."*

*"Re: A date with destiny to fill up a vacancy in the heart."*

*"I am looking for a girl who is intelligent, sincere, active, honest, well organised and truthful, preferably tall, slim and medium to fair complexion."*

*"The only snag in you is that you are a widow but this can be a snag in the view of other people. I am somewhat more liberal minded. For me a second hand Toyota is far better than a first hand Premier Padmini."*

*"I wish to assist you 24 hours in your dispensary and housework also. It's my wish to be with my love, working together."*

*"I am a very sexy man. By the style of your ad. I know that you are also in the same way of Bhagwan Rajneesh."*