

MAIN LEAD

unchained melody

No 'Desperate Housewives' for her! She's single, savvy and successful. AINDRILA MITRA and SAVIA RAJAGOPAL unravel why an increasing number of career-oriented women are shying away from wedlock

CASE STUDY I

Zeenat Khan, 31, unmarried, Assistant Vice-President, Publicity, Star India Ltd.

"I don't work just for the heck of it. Career became my priority over a course of time. Yes, people question my single status at this age, but I won't justify my decision to strangers. I do what I believe in and I'm not ready to be compromise in marriage either. I'm happy being independent and if I ever get married, one of the reasons will be to satisfy my motherly instincts. Otherwise, I'll adopt. My married friends actually say it's better being single!"

CASE STUDY II

Sabeha, 30, unmarried, Costume Designer

"I do not want my education to be wasted. I want to make something of my life instead of having a family. I want to experience life and the world outside. I am financially and emotionally secure. Often, married women put on a garb to show the world that they are happy when actually they are not. I don't think juggling between the two works, and your job becomes second priority. They sacrifice on the aims they had before marriage."

CASE STUDY III

Surabhi (name changed), 38, divorcee, Interior Designer

"I was married for three months and realised that I was not cut out for it. I'd given in to the pressures of settling down. I decided to go for divorce as it was suffocating me. My career was also suffering after I married. I wanted 'Me' to be my first priority, for a change. Marriage just wasn't meant for me. My only regret is that I caved into pressure and didn't get married because I wanted to."

Women are increasingly becoming assertive, be it in their professional or personal lives. But the issue in question is why are more and more career-centric women opting out of marriages? Women have managed jobs and family life simultaneously earlier. Explains Dr. Anjali Chhabria, psychiatrist, "Most ambitious women are averse to the idea of dealing with marital hassles. Also, once a woman attains financial independence, she might not be ready to compromise." Earlier women would get married primarily for financial security. Socially also there was actually a need to have a husband. Today, the situation is very different.

BEING SINGLE IS EASIER...

Dr. Kersi Chavda, consultant psychiatrist, Hinduja Hospital says, "It's always more difficult to reach a distinct position in the professional ladder when you're tied down by family. Somewhere down the line you're bound to compromise. Also, when one is married, the 'burning out' process becomes faster. Meeting social obligations, handling your hubby's ego, being the 'perfect' wife can be quite tedious." Women are calling the shots as they have become more self-assured. Financial independence lends to high self-confidence where the woman does not feel the

necessity of a man to stand by her. Also, contemporary successful women will not settle for second best. Hence, many career-driven women by choice prefer being single.

SOCIETY IS CHANGING...

Sociologist Farida Lambay, Vice Principal of College of Social Work, Nirmala Niketan, claims, "Previously, single women married by the time they were 25. However, now they have career options and their families are progressively becoming supportive of their decision. Hence their expectations have also changed. Professional women demand respect and liberty. There is tremendous competition and women want to achieve a lot more. With adoption increasing, motherhood is also taken care of."

TAKING A SECOND LOOK...

You're successful, single and seem to have almost everything at your feet. But is that enough? Not really, feels Dr. Chhabria. "Though in most cases, a woman's financial and physical needs are met, you need a partner to satisfy your emotional requirements too," she says. It's imperative to question: what happens after five years? And it's essential to strike a balance between professional and personal wants. Dr. Chavda adds that often unwed, proficient women start questioning their spinster status too late. Also, women who have strong maternal instincts may actually find it very difficult to cope with the vacuum of a biological child later in their lives. In certain cases, the woman may be commitment phobic where she doesn't want to be answerable to anyone.

THE BOTTOMLINE...

Explaining further, Dr. Chhabria says married women are usually more balanced whereas most unmarried women lead a very uni-dimensional existence. Sociologist Farida Lambay says that it's a matter of individual choice ultimately. To choose between marriage and career is a woman's prerogative.

FILE-O-FACTS

Pulitzer- prize winning journalist Susan Faludi points to methodical studies proving 60 per cent of single women believed they were happier than their married counterparts. 90 per cent of unmarried women said the reason they have not married is because they preferred not to. And the more women earn, the less eager they are to marry. Also, single women have better health and are more likely to have regular and satisfying sex than their married counterparts. In another study conducted globally, 24.4 per cent of unmarried women replied that they "don't feel it is necessary." And 20.1 per cent of them cited "lack of financial stability," followed by "husband's preference for wife to stay home" with 9.8 per cent and "responsibilities of married life" with 9.3 per cent. 4.4 per cent of them said marriage is a disadvantage to women.

