

# A new marriage law?

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**M**arriage in our society has become an expensive ceremony with the many *rasams* (customs) and functions that have now come to dominate the main show itself. Today every effort is made to make it certain that one's *mehndi* or *baraat* or for that matter any *rasam* is one of a kind affair and surpasses the so and so's function. The unending exercise in one-upmanship has turned the simple ceremony of *shadi* into a meg-buck, over the top display of pomp and *showbazi*. This precedent set by the upper class is exerting a lot of pressure on those from the lower strata to follow suit. All this while poverty is on the rise and more and more families are finding it hard to make both ends meet.

The government on numerous occasions has tried to restrain the undue show of wealth whether it is by showing off dowry or serving sumptuous meals to the guests. But these efforts failed to bring about

any positive change as they were shallow and very impractical. And now the present setup has come up with a "Marriage Expenses, Dowry and Bridal Gifts (Restriction) Act 2003. The new law is too impractical to be implemented. The problem is that we have laws and by-laws for everything and anything. But when it comes to implementation that is where the authorities flounder. What good is a law when it cannot or is not being implemented?

With over thirty percent of the people living below poverty line and taking into account the massive disparity in distribution of wealth, it is utterly wrong to say that the present draft is for all classes. Most of the restrictions envisaged in the draft law are not meant for the upper class. Moreover, the restrictions proposed are so impractical that these cannot be implemented at any stage. For example, how can you expect to restrict your expenses for all the wedding functions to the maximum of Rs 50,000 only when the amount being charged by marriage halls and hotels are so steep? Secondly the law itself presents a loophole to the offenders by allowing the treating of guests to sumptuous meals in the *chaar diwari* (within the walls) of their houses. Does this not nullify the very meaning of introducing the new law? The fact of the matter is that the target class should not be lower or middle class, but the upper class which spends huge amount of money on such events. They are the ones who show off the dowry and they are the ones who sometimes have as many as six to seven functions besides *baraat* and *valima*.

The proposed law cannot be implemented due to its impracticability. How does the government intend to verify the statement about the expenditure, about the gifts received and about the dowry given? How the authorities are to ask the prime minister or even a Grade-17 official whether he received any gifts other than from relatives. What guarantee do the authorities have that the verification agent would not make it a source of extracting money from the violators. All these questions cannot be answered by the government. Relying on the people to be truthful in such matters is like making the cat in charge of the milk pot. Only the impoverished will be exact in their statements, while for the rest such statements will be nothing more than fiction.

The bigwigs are the ones who openly flout these laws as no one can touch them. There are numerous reports of the elite openly defying the rule of serving one dish on weddings — but no one dared to touch them. What made the Law and Justice Commission come to the conclusion that this time round the same people will not do the same?

The idea is often floated that a campaign should be launched to educate people by raising awareness of the ills of ostentation by running awareness campaigns in the mass media and conducting consciousness raising workshops involving local communities at the union level. Such ideas are often floated by the non-governmental organisations forgetting the fact that such campaigns only target low level and lower middle class. Does this mean that the proposed law is only for the masses and not the classes who continue to go on flouting the law.

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# Blurred vision

By Zuhair Vazeer

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LET us analyze the situation we are facing, regarding our social values. Let me warn you, it is not a pretty picture. While everything may look placid on the surface, we are actually witnessing a decay of our social structure based on our ethical and moral code.

Our society is crumbling bit-by-bit. The path towards decline caused largely by external influences. In fact a complex exists within our society which is attracted to and accommodates western influences. This is in the form of the constant need to be something that we are not. An inferiority complex about our own value systems is inculcated by elements within our own society. We are constantly tempted by the so-called liberal

Western ideals.

Those who keep temptation at an arm's length are eventually branded as inferiors, stringently boring people, men and women who do not know how to have fun.

First let's look at the complex of inferiority: we point a finger at the person who refuses to pick up a glass of wine considering him a prude, a person who is non-liberal and doesn't know how to have 'real fun'. When we do this, we forget that we are the ones contributing to societal decay. We stubbornly ignore the fact that we have been programmed by the magical media and that the meaning of entertainment has been given to us by them, a concept we refuse to deviate from. We feel that one cant have fun unless one's head feel like it weighs a hundred pounds and is buzzing like a bumblebee! If someone prefers to stay home on a Saturday night instead of going out to a flesh exhibition and an orgy of intoxicants otherwise known as a "party", we call them inflexible, and backwards.

Since the late sixties the

pop-culture, even their wars have become an excuse for people to practise emancipation and 'free love'. Remember Vietnam? Everything from the excess culture of Hollywood, to their widespread international operations, have been patronized, glorified when presented by their state of the art media. And we, very conveniently, have opted to indulge ourselves. Why? Because of our inferiority complex and the constant need to match our lifestyle with that of the supposed superior race. Are we that deprived of our own culture and do we have no self-respect that we find solace and esoteric comfort in thinking that their level can be matched and the inferiority complex thus removed? Where is sagacity in all this? When wisdom exists in the form of self-discipline, we mock it with tremendous scorn.

Many young people, these days, are fond of numbing their senses with alcohol and



Illustration by Agha Riaz

other intoxicants. This clearly indicates that they are becoming more susceptible to 'programming' and becoming less capable of thinking on their own. After all the blood of the decadent rulers of the sub-continent is still running in our veins.

We want to pretend that everything is alright and will be alright because the CNN tells us so. We also want to pretend that the wars will not affect our enjoyable lifestyles. But the dilemma is that they already have affected us and their propaganda is being expediently shoved down our throats. We feel safe and unthreatened as long as ours is not one of the names on the 'list' that the Pentagon presumably has. We feel sad as we watch Iraq being pulverized, Palestine being raped and Kashmir unwittingly caught up in a mayhem, but only for as long as the footage lasts.

We feel that if we practise our faith, we would be bound. What we fail to realize is that it opens closed doors, offers solitude, peace of mind and the drive and eagerness to move forward.

The tools of temporary escapism, must be avoided