

MOST ELIGIBLE BACHELOR

**Prabir
Guha**



Planning a Timeout

When Piyush went on an official tour of the western parts of the country within a week of their silver wedding anniversary, Sheila finally got the opportunity she was waiting for.

While getting ready for office in the morning, she told her daughter Neha that she would pick her up from her institute on her way back.

Neha could not understand why her mother said that but liked the idea. She hardly ever got the opportunity to spend time with her parents since they were busy professionals.

Neha was in the final year for the degree of Masters in Business Administration and was doing pretty well in her studies.

She told her mother that her classes would be over at 4:30 pm. Sheila said that she could make it by about 5:30 pm at the earliest.

Neha nodded a "No worries." She had to work on a project at the institute and could use the hour for discussions with her team-mates.

Luckily, Sheila left her office earlier and drove straight to Neha's institute. Neha was waiting at the gate.

'Mom, can we go for a little drive, instead of going home straight?'

'That's a lovely idea; I also thought so.'



The office-hour traffic did not deter Sheila. She took the turn at the intersection and headed for the road by the river which she knew would not have a dense traffic.

It was ideal for spending a few leisurely moments with her daughter. She turned off the air-conditioner and rolled down the windows.

Sheila and Neha enjoyed the fresh air blowing in from across the river. At that moment, the difference in their ages melted away; mother and daughter became just good friends.

By the Flowing River

Neha suggested that they get out of the car and have a little walk. Sheila agreed. They parked their car, left their bags, and started walking hand in hand by the side of the river.

The sun was setting across the river and the neon lights had come on at the promenade. A simple walk on a regular evening turned out to be amazingly enchanting.



Eyeing a small restaurant Neha said,
'Mom, can we have an ice-cream? I am
hungry.'

'Why just an ice-cream? Let us see
what they have. I am also hungry.
Come.'

They chose a table overlooking the
river. Neha ordered a masala dosa and
Sheila settled for a plain dosa.

Sighting the day's newspaper on a rack,
Sheila made a beeline for it.

Neha rolled up her eyes.

'Thank God, it is a weekday, Mom!
There are no matrimonial columns
today.'



Marry - Who?

Neha had grown sick of her mother going through the matrimonial columns every Sunday trying to find a match for her and then trying to discuss the issue with her through the greater part of the morning and often during the lunch session. Effectively, Sundays had stopped being fun days!

'Mom, why do you keep searching and discussing this matter? You know I shall never go for a negotiated marriage. Leave it to me, please. That way, you and dad would be free any worries regarding my wedding.'

'And may I ask you why you have such an aversion for a negotiated marriage? What's wrong with it?'

'Well, I see no sense in it. Marriage is not a matter for negotiation. It is not a business deal. It is a matter of the heart. What is the big idea in matching horoscopes when the two young people are not in love with each other? I will marry a man whom I love.'

'Do you love such a man already?'

'Yes, I do. I would have told you in time. But now that you have brought the topic up let me tell you that yes I do.'

'Oh! That's great.' Sheila expressed her genuine happiness at the news. 'Tell me about this man. Who's this lucky man?'

The dosas arrived and both the ladies arranged their plates and bowls and the cutlery in their own preferred ways.

Neha tried a spoon of the chutney and started, 'He is Srijoy. We are studying together. We are good friends and enjoy each other's company. I do love him and I think I will marry him. We were both working on the project this evening before you came to pick me up.'

'But you had never told me about him so far.'

'I would have and I would have brought him over to meet you and Dad. That would have been in a few months – after both of us had finished our studies and got employed.'

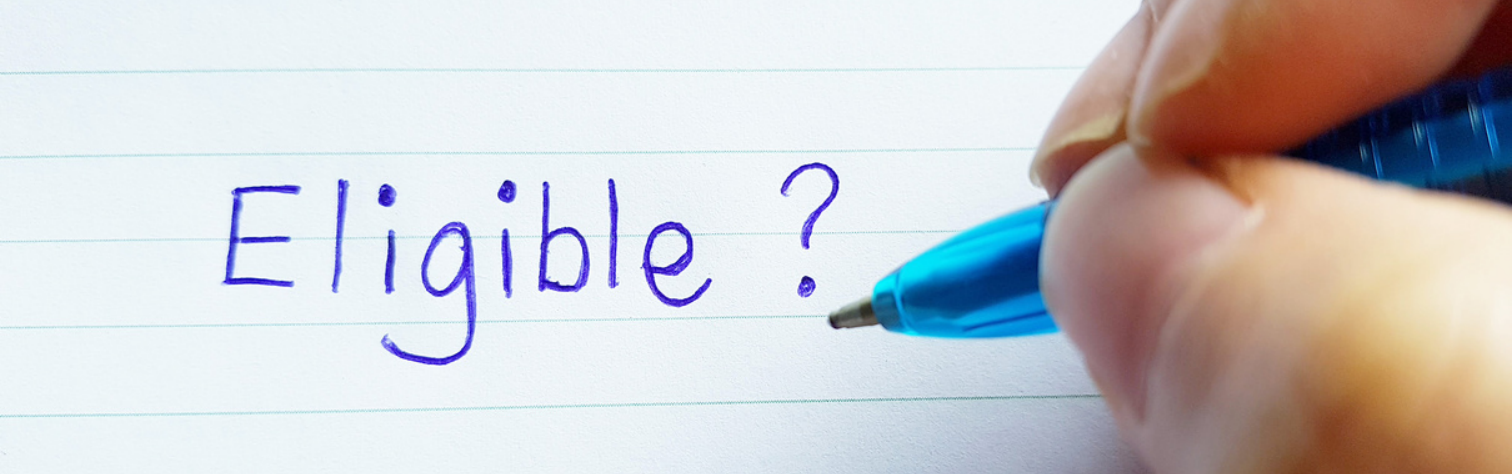
'Let's order for some sambar-vada, they might take time.' Sheila summoned the waiter and placed the order and asked Neha to continue. 'Tell me about Srijoy, he has got a very interesting name. I wonder what it means.'

'He is two years older than me. This is because he had done his engineering before joining this management course. He is five feet eight inches tall that is about four inches taller than me and now weighs sixty-five kilograms.'

'That's impressive; please tell me more about him.'

'Though he is darker than me I would not say that he is dark. He is handsome and walks straight.'

'Tell me about his family.'



Eligible ?

The Wish-list

'That's impressive; please tell me more about him.'

'Though he is darker than me I would not say that he is dark. He is handsome and walks straight.'

'Tell me about his family.'

'He has a younger brother. His father is a banker and is presently the vice-president of a multinational bank. His mother is a doctor specializing in psychiatry.'

She also gave the details of their up-market apartment in an exclusive neighborhood. She had been there once and said that they had two air-conditioners in the big living room. Sheila showed a lot of interest and said, 'Wow, that's great. What else do they have?'

Neha gave a detailed description of the carpet, the sofa, the drapery, the dining set, the refrigerators, and the large television set; all that she had seen on her visit to Srijoy's place.

Sheila asked for coffee for both of them and continued.

'Well, how about Srijoy's education? Where all did he study?'

Neha knew the answer well and reeled out the particulars with chronological perfection starting with his kindergarten level. She also knew what his grades had been in the last examination and the reason why he did not do as well as expected in his finance papers.

'What does his brother do?'

'Ajoy is finishing school this year. He wants to get into a good engineering college and has already started taking tuitions for that. Unlike Srijoy he is interested in games and plays in the school cricket team.'

'Tell me about Srijoy's interests in life. Has he ever been in a relationship?'

He has been through a broken love tangle. It ended while he was doing his engineering in Bangalore. It did not break his heart; he has taken it well in his stride. In fact, I am happy that he has been in a relationship before. He knows what girls want and how to satisfy them. He is not much of an outdoorsy person. He loves cooking and has recently taken up a course in Thai cookery.'

'Well, what are his plans for the future? Does he want to go abroad?'

'He is keeping his options open. He has not decided on going abroad now, though he has applied to a few universities in the USA. He says he will decide whether to go abroad after he finishes his course here.'

'Neha, you know him inside out. What else do you want to know before you decide to take the vow? And when do you think the time will be right for you to inform me and your dad?'

'Just a few months! The campus recruitments have started. Let us see what job he gets and whether we get in the same city. And besides I have told him to get his blood tested for aids and thalassemia. I will break the news to you and Dad if we get proper jobs in the same city and if his blood reports confirm that we have no reason to bother. Then we plan to live together for about a year to see how sexually compatible we are and that our points of view on major issues are similar. You see we cannot take any chances. Marriage is a serious affair.'

Sheila was amazed at her daughter's pragmatic approach to the matter, but had a simple question, 'You will get to the altar only if everything turns out the way you want it?'

'Yes, Mom. Don't you think that we are both going towards our marriage in a very rational way? Srijoy is the most eligible bachelor I know, but I must be sure. You see we don't believe in a negotiated marriage and I will have no one to blame if my marriage does not work out.'

Sheila did not answer immediately. Instead, she asked for the bill and paid it off putting in an adequate tip.

'We will carry on with our talk driving back home,' was all she said.



What's More Important?

They walked back to the car. Sheila weaved into the traffic which had become quite sparse now. The office crowd had disappeared. Driving was relatively easier, and she could talk at leisure.

'I must say that you have been very systematic in amassing all the information about Srijoy. Your approach had been logical and rational to the extreme. I congratulate you on that.'

Neha smiled but kept quiet. She knew her mom had not finished speaking.

'I got married a quarter of a century ago on the advice of my parents. They told me that Piyush was a good person and I believed. I was sure that they must have found out all that was required to be found out.'

Casting a brief glance to ensure if her daughter was listening, Sheila continued, 'I always trusted their intentions though not their competence. And I must say that the marriage turned out fine. It was what people of your generation would call a negotiated marriage and love came much later.'

Neha interjected, 'Yeah, that is all right for your generation. But I want my marriage to be based on love and nothing else. For you love came much later, we cannot wait for that to happen and take the risk. Suppose it doesn't happen?'

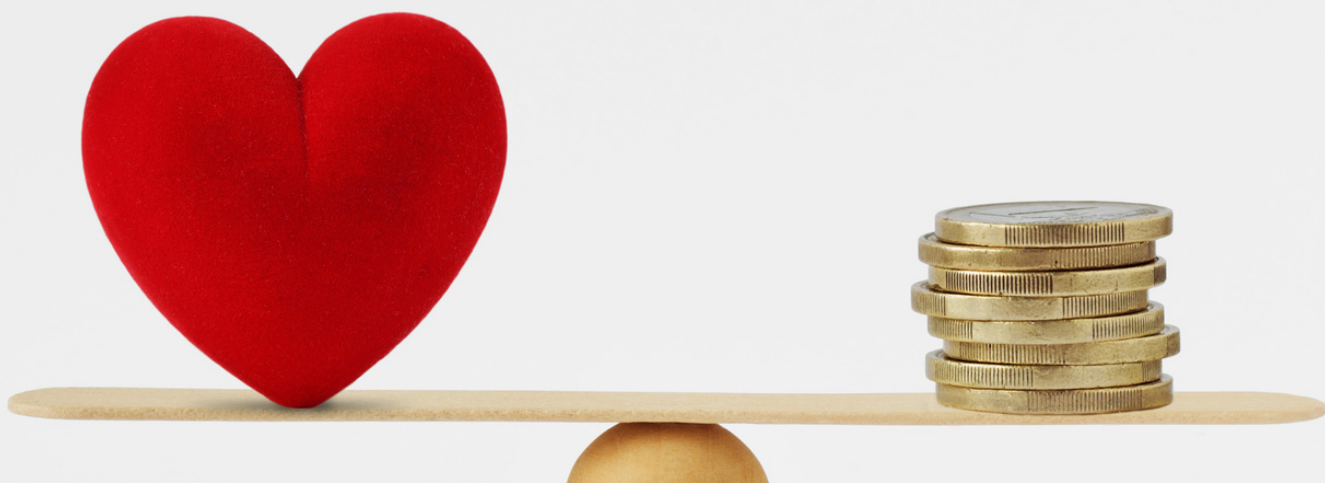
'Sheila nodded, 'It was sure different at that time. Our parents thought that we would be compatible on most issues in life which included matters of sex. We took their word for it and let that compatibility influence our daily activities which created a connect. This formed the basis of a friendship which later flowered into love.'

Seeing Neha open her mouth to speak, Sheila pushed without pausing, 'This love took some time to come and perhaps that is why it became so enduring. This love has over a period of years matured into complacency and now we take each other for granted.'

Neha asked, 'But what would have happened if it did not turn out to be a fairy-tale stuff with both of you living happily ever after?'

Sheila agreed, 'Well, it certainly was not a fairy-tale stuff. We had to create the success. No fairy godmother handed it to us. However, the social norms of the day ensured that we did not fall apart at the initial stages of our marital life. We did not allow any minor issue to develop into a catastrophe as we knew and accepted the fact that the marriage had to be honored. There were no two ways about it.'

'Your marriage was based on faith on a belief that it would work and fortunately for you and Dad, it worked. It was not based on love. I will not try it. I love Srijoy, and therefore, I shall marry him. That is the only reason. This is certainly a firm foundation for marital bliss. Don't you think so?'



Evaluated Love?

Suddenly a dog from nowhere crossed the road right in front of the car. Sheila screeched to a halt and then carried on.

'I have serious doubts about it. I do not think that you really love Srijoy. You are only considering him as a possible candidate who needs to be evaluated. And you are making that evaluation based on facts as you would if you were buying a pet.'

'I kept on asking you questions about him only to find out how much you know about him. You have done your research well.'

I wouldn't have been surprised if you had even told me how many hairs he has on his scalp. Love is not fact-finding, my dear.

You do not fall in love because a person is perfect down to the last blood test. Love is losing your head over someone. It is letting your heart take over.

You wouldn't have bothered to find out what his bone-mass index was if you had been in love. For, in that case, no obese person would have ever got married.

You have already found out more information about the groom than any old-fashioned person going for a negotiated marriage would have ever thought of, and yet you have not decided!"

'You are waiting to find out where he is going to be employed. What would you do if he ever loses his job? Will you stop loving him?

You are waiting to see his blood reports. Will your love evaporate if he contacts a deadly disease in a few years?

Neha, my dear, go and fall in love with a man, and then tell me how much you care to know about him.'

A visibly agitated Neha blurted out, 'Mom, I do love him, and I can prove it to you!'

Sheila smiled and reached out to give her daughter a quick hug before focusing back on the road ahead.

'Love does not require a proof. You do not have to convince me that you love someone.

Do you know when your dad got his last promotion? Do you know what power spectacles I wear? Do you know what marks your little brother got in Mathematics in the last examinations?

You do not, because you love them, and you love them for what they are to you and not for what they have or what they have achieved, or what their future potentials are.

Would you love your dad any less if he loses his job tomorrow or if I go blind tomorrow or if your little brother fails to go to the next class at the end of the year? You would not because you truly love them.'



Go, Fall in Love!

A much bonded mother-daughter duo returned home. Sheila turned the engine off once the car was parked in the garage. Hand in hand, they walked into the house. For both, the evening tête-à-tête had been emotionally fulfilling.

As she opened the refrigerator to see what they could have for dinner, Sheila heard her daughter in the bedroom on the phone, 'Srijoy?'

At the dining table, Neha announced with a big smile, 'Mom, Srijoy will come over to meet you as soon as Dad returns from his tour.'