



The Pressure to Get Married



By: Sharan Khela
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“So... when are you getting married?” This is a question that plagues just about every South Asian woman when we hit a certain age, typically in our mid-twenties. Attached to it is this immense pressure to abide by the traditional notion that marriage is needed for a woman to be settled and fulfilled in life. Dealing with constant taunts from relatives, emotional manipulation, and internalized feelings of guilt makes it difficult for South Asian women to stand up for their own needs.

Growing up I have heard multiple times that I can do everything I want to once I'm married:

“You can go on vacation when you're married!”

“You can dress however you want to when you're married!”

“You can have all the fun you want once you're married!”



Why is marriage placed on such a high pedestal, and seen as a one way ticket to self-fulfillment and happiness? It is as if women cannot become their own person independently. My mother had to give up on her dreams and aspirations to serve her husband, in-laws, and children. She was only 18 when she was married off and sent to Canada to pursue a new life she never asked for. She lost herself in the process of trying to become the perfect wife, daughter-in-law and mother. Although my mother realizes this, she also poses the marriage question to my sister whenever she comes home to visit. This is a result of traditional views, along with taunts and questions from other relatives. However, over time we've helped my mother realize that marriage is not needed in order to survive. Now this is not to say that marriage is inherently evil and unfulfilling, but that pressuring daughters to get married when they're not ready for such a lifelong commitment is wrong.

Women do not need a partner in order to be satisfied, successful, happy, and whole. It is about time South Asian parents recognize that their daughters are strong willed and resilient individuals who have the ability to make their own dreams and goals a reality. I have also often seen how the achievements we make as daughters are ignored and the conversation is rerouted to marriage:

“Now that you've graduated/found a job, when do you plan on getting married?”

In the case of my older sister as well, she is rarely commended for being self-sufficient, having moved out and working within her field of choice. It always comes back to questions around marriage and how that is the logical next step. However, the marriage pressure is not as imposed onto sons. They're often allowed to figure out their lives, openly have relationships, and build their careers before they even have to consider marriage.

I once had an aunty tell me that I ought to get married by the age of 25, regardless of whether I'm financially stable or not. According to her, these things get figured out post-marriage. This is possibly some of the worst advice I have ever received. Daughters should be encouraged to develop their independence so that they can stand up against all odds.

Overall, our achievements and successes should not be placed second to marriage. Daughters should be empowered to be independent, to follow their dreams and to live their lives on their own terms.



Sharan Khela is a second-generation South Asian-Canadian living in Brampton, Ontario. She will be joining Ryerson University for their Master of Arts in Public Policy and Administration in September 2021. She works with Laadliyan as a Research Coordinator and is also working as a Research and Policy Intern with the Ryerson Leadership Lab this summer.