



the
many
conditions
of love

Join the Marriage Bureau for Rich People

FARAHAD ZAMA

'Fascinating and moving' *Daily Mail*

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ALSO BY FARAHAD ZAMA

The Marriage Bureau for Rich People

The Many Conditions of Love

FARAHAD ZAMA

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~~SOME EXTRACTS FROM THE SPECIAL MARRIAGE ACT, 195~~

In India, people of each religion or community are governed by their own personal laws in matters involving marriage, divorce and inheritance. When people of different religions wish to get married they do so under . . .

An Act to provide a special form of marriage in certain cases . . . enacted by Parliament in the Fifth Year of the Republic of India . . .

Notwithstanding anything contained in any other law for the time being in force relating to the solemnization of marriages, a marriage between any two persons may be solemnized under this Act, at the time of the marriage the following conditions are fulfilled namely:

- a. neither party has a spouse living;
- b. neither party

- (i) is incapable of giving a valid consent to it in consequence of unsoundness of mind, or
- (ii) though capable of giving a valid consent, has been suffering from mental disorder of such a kind or to such an extent as to be unfit for marriage and the procreation of children; or
- (iii) has been subject to recurrent attacks of insanity or epilepsy;

- c. the male has completed the age of twenty-one years and the female the age of eighteen years;
- d. the parties are not within the degrees of prohibited relationship:

Provided that where a custom governing at least one of the parties permits of a marriage between them, such marriage may be solemnized, notwithstanding that they are within the degrees of prohibited relationship.

Explanation I

Relationship includes:

- a. relationship by half or uterine blood as well as by full blood:
- b. illegitimate blood relationship as well as legitimate;
- c. relationship by adoption as well as by blood;

Explanation II

'Full blood' and 'half blood' - two persons are said to be related to each other by full blood when they are descended from a common ancestor by the same wife and by half blood when they are descended from a common ancestor but by different wives.

Explanation III

'Uterine blood' - two persons are said to be related to each other by uterine blood when they are descended from a common ancestress but by different husbands.

Explanation IV

In Explns II and III 'ancestor' includes the father and 'ancestress' the mother.

Notices of intended marriage

When a marriage is intended to be solemnized under this Act, the parties of the marriage shall give notice thereof in writing in the Form specified in the Second Schedule to the Marriage Officer of the district in which at least one of the parties to the marriage has resided for a period of not less than thirty days immediately preceding the date on which such notice is given.

The Marriage Officer shall cause every such notice to be published by affixing a copy thereof in some conspicuous place in his office.

Objection to marriage

(1) Any person may, before the expiration of thirty days from the date on which any such notice has been published under sub-section (2) of Sec. 6, object to the marriage on the ground that it would contravene one or more of the conditions specified in Sec. 4.

(2) After the expiration of thirty days from the date on which notice of an intended marriage has been published under sub-section (2) of Sec. 6, the marriage may be solemnized, unless it has been previously objected to under sub-section (1).

Declaration by parties and witnesses

Before the marriage is solemnized the parties and three witnesses shall, in the presence of the Marriage Officer, sign a declaration in the Form specified in the Third Schedule to this Act, and the declaration shall be countersigned by the Marriage Officer.

Place and form of solemnization

(1)The marriage may be solemnized at the office of the Marriage Officer or at such other place within a reasonable distance therefrom as the parties may desire, and upon such conditions and the payment of such additional fees as may be prescribed.

2)The marriage may be solemnized in any form which the parties may choose to adopt: Provided that it shall not be complete and binding on the parties unless each party says to the other in the presence of the Marriage Officer and the three witnesses and in any language understood by the parties, 'I (A) take thee (B), to be my lawful wife (or husband).'

CHAPTER ONE

The noise level in the café dropped noticeably when the glamorous young woman stepped in. The clientele was exclusively male and mostly rustic. Villagers with dhotis round their waists and white shawls over their bare shoulders were talking loudly at the tightly packed, chipped-Formica tables. The conversations were all about grain prices, crop yields and prospects of rain for the next season. A few salesmen in shirts and trousers, carrying fake leather valises, were sprinkled among the farmers touting fertilisers, tractors and the benefits of various seed varieties - genetically modified and not. A couple of harried waiters rushed around with plates of steaming idlis and small, half-filled glasses of tea.

The young woman was wearing an elegant, maroon, machine-silk sari that hugged her figure. Her glossy dark mane of hair fell in waves and set off the oval shape of her fair face. Dark sunglasses were pushed up and covered the edge of her hair rather than her eyes. The heels of her shoes went clack-clack on the hard cement floor as she ignored everybody and walked to the back of the café, toward an empty table being cleared by a thin boy in a tattered shirt who looked about twelve. He swept the dirty plates and crockery into a red plastic bowl on his hip and wiped the table with a dirty rag. When he finished cleaning the table, the young woman moved past him and said, 'Excuse me.'

The boy was so surprised by the fragrant, well-mannered lady that he gawped silently at her and dropped his rag on the floor. Blushing deeply, he dived to the floor, picked up the dishcloth and ran to another corner of the room.

A young man, sitting at the next table and looking at her with rather more surprise than the others in the café, turned towards her and said, 'We should stop bumping into each other like this, Usha.'

She looked startled at being addressed by name in this place and looked at him sharply for a moment before breaking into a smile. 'Rehman,' she said. 'How come you are here?'

He shrugged his shoulders. 'I was in a neighbouring village for the last few days and I am returning home now.'

'Oh! Am I missing a scoop?' she said and left her table and walked over to his. 'Is the government planning to take over the farmers' lands there?'

'Always the journalist,' said Rehman and Usha laughed. 'No,' he continued. 'That was a different time and a different place. A friend of mine is from the village and I occasionally visit his family.'

Usha was a TV reporter who a few months ago had covered a campaign run by Rehman to prevent special economic zone being set up on fertile agricultural land that had been compulsorily purchased from farmers who had owned it for generations.

A waiter came over and asked Usha whether she wanted anything. She looked lost and Rehman said to the waiter, 'Mineral water.'

'Normal or cooling?'

'Cooling,' said Rehman and the waiter walked away. Rehman turned to Usha and said, 'What about you? Why are you here?'

'The car had a puncture and the driver decided to get the tyre repaired while we were in town rather than risk going on through the middle of nowhere without a spare. I walked down the street and came in here to get out of the sun.'

The waiter returned with a bottle of water, its outer surface damp in the moist air. He showed them that the seal on the bottle was unbroken and twisted the cap open. He left them with two empty glasses. Rehman stopped Usha when she started pouring water into the glasses. 'You'd better drink straight from the bottle. I wouldn't trust the cleanliness here,' he said, running a finger around the inside of the glass and showing her the resulting greasy smear.

Her face scrunched tight and her shoulders stiffened in a small shudder. 'What about you?' she asked.

'I'll stick to tea,' he said.

Usha smiled at him and took a sip of water; her eyes closed and head raised as the bottle tilted forward. Rehman glanced at her delicate throat for a long moment and looked away before she opened her eyes. He suddenly felt scruffy. His two-week-old beard was at an awkward stage. His usual khamani shirt had been torn at the side and roughly patched by his friend's father. His leather chappals - open-toed slippers - looked the worse for wear after braving the mud of paddy fields for the last ten days.

'How are you getting back to Vizag?' asked Usha.

'By bus,' said Rehman. He looked at his watch. 'The next one is in less than half an hour. I'd better not miss it because there are no more after that until this evening.'

An old man walked into the café with a small boy, and Rehman raised his right hand and waved

them. Usha twisted half round to look. The old man had white whiskers and a beard. His face was dark and the skin stretched over his bones. His open mouth showed gaps in his teeth. The boy was about eight years old and smiling. He skipped ahead of his grandfather and came to their table.

‘Rehman Uncle! Look!’ he said, his eyes shining, and showed Rehman a book. ‘I’ve got my own maths textbook.’

Rehman ruffled his hair and said, ‘Fantastic. Now there’s no excuse not to come first in the class.’

‘I’m already first in my class. In fact, my teacher has asked me to sit with the older boys.’

‘I know. I was just joking,’ said Rehman.

‘Who is this lady?’ asked the boy.

‘This is a friend of mine. Her name is Usha Aunty.’

The boy grinned at her. There was a wide gap where two of his upper front teeth had fallen out.

‘What’s your name?’ she asked him.

‘Vasu,’ said the boy.

Rehman and Usha stood up as the old man reached their table. Rehman pulled a chair over from another table. After they all sat down, Rehman asked the old man, ‘How did it go?’

The old man pulled out a bundle of money and showed it to them. ‘Very well, thanks to you.’

‘Be careful, sir! Don’t wave the money about,’ said Rehman, looking around the busy café.

‘You are right. There are wicked people in this world who will steal a farmer’s harvest money without feeling a moment’s remorse,’ the old man said and put the money away. He turned to Usha. ‘This money is not all mine to keep. The previous two harvests were not very good, so most of it will go to repay the loans I took.’

Usha nodded. The waiter came and took their order - tea for the old man and milk for his grandson.

Vasu said to his grandfather, 'Thaatha, this lady is Rehman Uncle's Usha Aunty.'

Rehman gave an uncomfortable laugh and said, 'She is not *my* aunty - just a friend.'

Usha's cheeks went red. Vasu's grandfather turned to her and said, 'Namaste.'

Usha joined her hands and inclined her head to him.

He saw her mobile phone on the table and said, 'I never thought these modern things would be useful to a small farmer like me but Rehman's proved me wrong.'

'Oh!' she said. 'How did he do that?'

'This morning, we were not sure whether to come to this mandi or go to another market twenty miles away. So, Rehman called up the grain merchants on his phone and found out that the price here was better. Because I use a bullock cart, once I decide which market to take my harvest to, I cannot change my mind.'

'Rehman Uncle climbed the tree in front of our house to make the call,' said Vasu.

'Really?' asked Usha, looking at him.

Rehman shrugged. 'There was no signal on the ground near the house,' he said.

'He almost fell down,' said Vasu. 'His shirt tore and thaatha had to stitch it, because that was the only clean shirt he had.'

'Shhh!' said Rehman and laughed. For some reason, he felt embarrassed.

'It's time we went. I have to take the cart back to its owner before the evening,' said Vasu's grandfather.

They all stood up. The old man turned to Rehman and said, 'May God keep you well always.'

'With your blessings, Mr Naidu,' said Rehman.

‘Thanks for all the help in bringing in the harvest. I don’t think even my own son would have done as much,’ the old man said, tears brimming in his eyes. He took the boy’s hand and left.

Rehman looked at his watch. ‘Almost time for my bus. I’d better make my way too.’

‘I’ll go and see the car as well. It should be fixed by now.’

Rehman picked up his bulging cotton bag and a heavy gunny sack. They walked over to the front of the café where the owner, a podgy man with a round, shiny face, was sitting behind a table. A frayed ten-year-old calendar with the picture of Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, was hanging behind his head. There were five other people in front of them waiting to pay their bills. The queue moved slowly. Rehman looked at his watch and frowned.

‘What is it?’ said Usha.

‘My bus . . . it’s almost time. My mother won’t be happy if I don’t get home for dinner.’

Usha nodded. She had met Rehman’s mother a couple of times and knew that she was not a woman to be crossed lightly. They reached the head of the queue in a few minutes and Rehman smiled at Usha.

‘Thank God,’ he said.

The owner rang a little bell and their gaunt waiter came rushing over. ‘One plate idli, two teas, one milk, one mineral water,’ he said.

The owner totalled up their bill and said, ‘Ten rupees for food and tea, twelve for the water; total twenty-two, sir.’

Usha tried to take money out from her purse but Rehman waved her down and paid the bill with a twenty-rupee note and a five-rupee coin. The owner returned three rupees and Rehman turned back to give the money to the waiter as a tip but the waiter had already gone back into the café. Rehman shrugged - he didn’t have time to hang around. It was silly that he had waited with nothing to do for such a long time and now he was rushed in the last few minutes.

As he turned towards the front of the café, a glint of steel caught his eye from among the assembled customers.

‘Rehman, hurry,’ said Usha from near the entrance. ‘I can see a bus coming.’

But Rehman’s attention could not be diverted from the scene unfolding in front of him. He noticed what no one else in the café seemed to have seen: a young man in shirt and trousers had cut open the side of a farmer’s rough cotton kurta and was extracting a fat, rolled-up bundle of cash from the pocket of the loose shirt.

‘Hey!’ shouted Rehman, flinging up his hand and pointing towards the youth.

Everybody froze for a moment and then the farmer who was being pickpocketed reacted. ‘How dare you—’ he said and grabbed at the thief.

But all he clutched was empty air because the young man moved faster and started running. He pushed a chair at Rehman, sped towards the exit and blundered straight into a bewildered Usha, almost knocking her down. The small delay this caused was enough for Rehman to jump forward and seize the man’s shirt just outside the café. A second later the farmer and his friends surrounded Rehman and the pickpocket. The men made the thief turn out his pockets and found two bundles of money. The farmers started shouting and landing blows on the robber. A rage bubbled up inside Rehman, in a way that it hadn’t for years. The anger worried him but he suppressed it with an effort and shouted, ‘Stop! stop!’ He pushed the men away from the snivelling youth. ‘Don’t beat him. Take him to the police.’

‘What will the police do? Garland him with flowers?’ said the farmer whose shirt had been cut.

‘We cannot take the law into our own hands.’

‘Rehman,’ said Usha from outside the group of men. ‘Your bus has come, you have to leave now.’

Rehman turned to the farmer. ‘You caught him because of me and got your money back. Don’t beat him up, please. Take him to the thana, the police station. I have to leave now or I’ll miss my bus otherwise I’d come with you.’

Most of the men were still shouting angrily and still trying to hit the man who was now cowering in front of Rehman, trying to keep as much distance from the others as possible.

The farmer nodded. ‘I am in your debt - you’ve saved me today from horrible trouble.’ He lifted the bundle of notes that he was clutching in his right hand and said, ‘This is not just money. This is the loan that I repay and keep my standing in the community; this is each seed and grain of fertiliser to plant the next crop and remain a farmer and this is every necessity that I provide my family until the next harvest that next crop. Because of that debt, I’ll do as you say.’

Rehman nodded and the men dragged the pickpocket away. Not all of them resisted giving the young man a smack or a kick every so often. Rehman turned to Usha and they hurried in the opposite direction on the dusty road. The bus was waiting at the stop. It was already full and a mob of people were at its two doors, getting in, women in the front and men at the back. A few boys were doing brisk business selling tea through the windows to already-seated passengers. Rehman pursed his lips in a silent whistle as he looked at the scene.

‘There’s no way you’ll get on that bus, especially with that sack,’ said Usha.

Rehman nodded his head slowly. He looked at his watch and said, ‘Well, another four hours to go. I’d better call ammi and tell her that I won’t be home for dinner.’

‘Don’t be ridiculous,’ said Usha. ‘I’m going back to town too and I can drop you off.’

‘Are you sure?’ asked Rehman. ‘I don’t want to be any trouble.’

Usha laughed and said, ‘You are so formal. Let’s go and find out whether the puncture has been repaired. Do you want me to carry your bag?’

Rehman looked down at the cotton bag holding his soiled clothes and shook his head.

They walked down the road through the busy street, past the cart selling flip-flops, the cart selling coloured ice-water and the shop displaying bright children’s clothes and lurid-pink plastic toys. Rehman thought they must make an odd pair - the groomed, perfumed, rich young girl in the class sari and the rough-looking man with an unkempt beard, carrying a sack of brinjals and red spinach from Mr Naidu’s farm on his shoulder, like a coolie. They passed the wide front of a cinema showing posters of a heavy-set man with bloodshot eyes and arrived at a gold-coloured car by the side of the road with one of its wheels on a jack.

‘Isn’t it ready yet?’ said Usha to the short, dark man in his forties standing by the car.

‘Sorry, madam,’ said the driver. ‘Almost done. It will be another five minutes.’

‘Make it quick,’ said Usha. She pointed to the sack that Rehman was carrying and said, ‘Put it in the boot.’

‘Right, madam,’ the driver said and walked round to the back of the car and opened the boot. H

turned to Rehman. 'Be careful. Don't let the sack touch the edge here,' he said, pointing to the sill.

Rehman put the sack into the car. As he turned away, Usha said, 'Why don't you put your bag away too?'

Rehman nodded and said, 'Good idea.'

He swung the bag in and the driver looked at them open-mouthed. 'But . . . madam—' he said.

Usha looked at him severely and said, 'Yes, Narsi? Do you have a problem?'

The driver gulped and closed his mouth. He shook his head and said, 'No, madam. What problem can I have?'

'Good!' said Usha and turned away. Rehman followed her. 'Narsi probably thought you were a porter carrying that sack for me,' she said, smiling at him.

Rehman looked down at himself and shrugged. 'Not surprising, given the way I look. Weren't you a bit severe with him?'

'He's a slime ball. He beats his wife,' she said. 'And I'm sure he's going to carry tales about you to my father.'

'If it's going to be any trouble . . .' began Rehman.

'No, no! I don't mind.' She pointed to a man sitting cross-legged by the roadside on a small mat. He had a tiny wooden cage next to him. 'Look, a parrot astrologer. Let's get our fortunes read.'

Rehman shook his head. 'You can't believe in that, surely?'

Usha smiled and said, 'Maybe I do and maybe I don't. But it'll be a time-pass and we'd be helping to keep alive a traditional occupation.'

Rehman met her eyes and smiled, shaking his head. 'You always know what to say, don't you?'

Rehman and Usha sank down to their knees on the mat in front of the astrologer. The man twirled

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