

# THE SEXUAL FEARS OF MEN

Chaitanya Kalbag

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Perhaps Kinsey would have an exhilarating time if he were to conduct a survey among young Indian men on their sexual fears and phobias. We have a long way to go before we attain the permissiveness of the West, say some wise men. But what strikes any observer is the fact that, more than thirty years after we freed ourselves from the shackles of colonialism, we are yet to liberate ourselves from the clutches of a sexual paranoia that is rooted in superstition, tradition, and "old brides' tales."

One of the ironies of being an Indian male seems to be that far from being an assertive, aggressive and authoritative sexual brute, he is very often a timid, confused, and reluctant creature. Most people (usually women) are taken in by the veneer of confidence and put-on bravado that disguises his bewilderment.

According to a young man who has seen more of life since he went to the United States to study, "We lack basic information about matters sexual. What do you get here? Whispered nonsense from your repressed friends, stern rebukes from your parents, and an occasional and furtive glance at pornographic photographs under your school desk. Nobody really tells young people what it is all about."

"Sex is a terrifying prospect," says A, a well-built engineer working for a leading firm. "When it comes to the ABC of the thing, I'm as ignorant as a kid in the kindergarten."

N had a traumatic experience when he got married. He had amiably subjected himself to the routine of an arranged marriage. The girl had come from a respectable family, and the gifts and goodwill at the wedding had made conjugal life seem quite rosy. "Everything went wrong," says N morosely. "My wife is as scared about sex as I am, and it has all along been a groping, juvenile sort of experience, with all the attendant disappointments. I suppose we will have a kid one of these days, and then things will cool off very rapidly."

One surprising feature of this sexual ignorance that I came across is the fact that most young men try to glean their knowledge from books — fiction in most cases. A bookstore owner told me about how he used to be amused at first at the surreptitious manner in which male customers would sidle in, leaf through the more erotically-titled books, and then, very much like in *Summer of '42*, buy their choice as though they were exchanging State secrets with an enemy spy. Later, the bookstore owner says, he was more saddened than amused: "What good can Sasthi Brata do to these people in terms of education?"

A psychiatrist, who is a counsellor in a city college and has

many boys coming to him with problems connected with sex, says that most men end up with very idealistic and excessively romanticized ideas about sex from such encounters with the printed word, and that the real experience very often leaves the man shattered.

"I had visions about sweeping some girl off her feet and into my bedroom," says R, a successful young management trainee. "I was scared and excited at the same time about the idea, and felt that my position, and my education, would make things easier. What do you think happened...?"

S was a pale young Sybarite who in college came across a one-in-a-million girl who was able and willing. "But when it was just around the corner, I discovered that I was absolutely ignorant about sex, and decided that I'd do something desperate, put myself through a crash sex-education course, just so that I wouldn't flop when the great moment came."

For a classroom, S chose a call-girl's dingy bedroom, after some secretive telephoning and

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a hefty payment. It was an expensive mistake, discovered S. He was unable to perform satisfactorily, he told me, and his hopes of being a success with his girl crashed to the ground.

Some young men I spoke to had resorted to the extreme measure of visiting a "sex clinic," and came away with a sour taste in their mouths. Others had approached counsellors who more often than not did not sympathise with, or even understand the dilemma facing these persons.

**Barrel-chested Romeos proclaim they are 'super' in bed. The truth is they feel confused, inadequate, threatened, when confronted with sex. In short, they are plain scared!**

Ignorance about sex and the various allied manifestations of this ignorance are probably peculiar to societies that are particularly taboo-ridden and prudish — as our society certainly is.

However, there are several other fears that men have about sex which are perhaps more universal. I gave serious thought to the subject and came up with the following points.

One of the biggest stumbling blocks men have to overcome in their sexual lives is their fear of inadequacy, which takes on a number of forms.

For one thing, just as women have to contend with the physical ideal of the sexy woman (Sophia Loren, Jacqueline Bisset, Mumtaz, Zeenat Aman) men have to tussle with the ideal image of the masculine, virile, po-

tent, devastating, "macho" man (Sean Connery, Richard Burton, Marlon Brando, Vinod Khanna, Dharmendra). Since not all men can look like these ideals or exude the sexiness they seem to do almost unconsciously, the feeling that they are physically "lesser" beings and that their women might be disappointed in their "inferior" physique often troubles the "ordinary" man.

Secondly, there is the fear that they might not be able to perform at the crucial moment. This form of the fear of inadequacy is heightened by the fact that they don't look like the "macho" role-models or feel as confident as the heroes of novels and films — James Bond, for instance, seems to be able to rise to the occasion even after a day full of chases, hunts, shoot-outs, tortures and all the rest that is packed into 24 hours of 007's life.

The fear of inadequacy also fills many men with apprehension about being able to please a woman. For many men (and, in India at least, many women) female sexuality is something vague and distant, about which they know little or nothing. And, with talk of the elusive female orgasm coming closer to home, some men feel ill-equipped to bring their women to it.

A second major phobia that men face today, said J, is that of being dominated by the woman. Especially now when some women are becoming more conscious of their sexuality and their right to sensual pleasure, they may try to tell their husband or lover what they would and would not like them to do. This is a breaking away from the traditional pattern, even in sex, of the aggressive male and the passive female, and many men who are confronted with it feel threatened, unable to accept it.

Coupled with this is a fear that these "dominating" women might be insatiable, said J.

The bug-bear of "incompatibility" is, of course, a fear that men and women share. And some men live in dread of being compared to other men the woman has known.

A major fear that many men share is the fear of hurting the woman, especially when she is a virgin.

Everyone was, above all, very reluctant to speak about sexual fears and phobias. Most men seemed to be afraid of not being "up to the mark" in the bedroom, and one got the impression that the slightest rebuff from a partner would send such a man into a depressed withdrawal. "It's very frightening and intriguing, too," says R. "It's like walking a tightrope over some inviting water and not knowing when you'll slip and fall in and what the water finally will turn out to be."

