

Dancing with a Stranger

Important note: *Everything I say below is only my opinion, which is based on my own experiences, or based on what I have read, heard and observed. There are no absolute truths or ultimate answers.*

Introduction

One of the most beautiful things that can happen to a woman is having a loving and caring relationship with a man. Even though modern women are no longer "dependent" on men in ways they used to be in the olden days, the positive influence of a loving heterosexual relationship on a woman's life is undeniable. Indeed, every young woman spends, right from the onset of puberty, a considerable amount of her time and energy looking for the right man.

This pursuit of the "right man" is most natural, and it is fraught with all sorts of challenges and dangers, and alas men continue to disappoint; but it is still something I encourage every young woman to engage in despite the risks and bad experiences.

Although hooking up with a good man by **falling in love** is certainly the best way, a lot of women must find their man through the "arranged" route (as defined below). The question of using this route to find the man and **living with him** is a huge dilemma.

In this article, I wish to try to help every modern young woman (and her hapless mother) understand the pros and cons of arranged marriage.

What is arranged marriage?

It might be interesting to look closely at the definition of "arranged marriage" since it seems to have changed quite a bit over time. In the good old days, parents arranged everything including matchmaking and the woman usually first met her husband during their first night in bed! Imagine her trauma! Today, things have changed for the better. The woman is involved in the process; she might even do the matchmaking herself using one of the dating websites or agencies. Many couples spend a few months or even years figuring each other out before getting married. In my opinion, that is still an arranged marriage because right from the first interaction the intention of the woman is clear: she is measuring up the man for his potential as her husband. It is certainly not falling in love head over heels!

Why live with a man?

A woman might decide to live with a man for one or more of the following reasons. Every woman should consider all the factors below to make a "prima facie" determination of whether living with her man is in her best interests.

Romantic love:

Do we need to explain this?! Romantic love may be described as the kind of affection that nourishes your heart -- the emotional side of your brain. For some, this type of love may even nourish the soul (or spirit). It unleashes all sorts of positive energies and creative juices in the woman. This is arguably the best way for a woman to find her man.

Clearly, in arranged marriage, which is a contractual and obligatory association, it is most unlikely that something as spontaneous, sublime, and delicate as love may flourish. But, there is certainly potential for a caring and respectful connection.

Sexual love:

Sexual love is really a logical extension (or some may say a "powerful expression") of romantic love. The woman needs sexual satisfaction as much as the man does, although the main difference might be that emotional involvement (romantic love) is a prerequisite for women to truly enjoy sexual intimacy to the fullest.

Women, who have experienced sex and sexual love, understand the subtle difference between the two. Sexual love is the expression of romantic love. It nourishes her being with vitality and energizes her body to be alive. It touches the woman's heart, soul, eyes, beauty and all other senses. Sex, on the other hand, is purely physical – an expression of repressed desire. It might feel good but it leaves the woman unfulfilled.

Arranged marriage has the potential to satisfy the sexual needs of the woman, but, in the absence of "romantic love" the intensity of sexual enjoyment is of a different degree. There is potential for enjoyable sex if the man is considerate and respectful. But, for a lot of women in arranged marriage (especially if the woman did not pick her partner), sex simply becomes a chore at best or an unpleasant compromise at worst.

Motherhood:

This is probably the most powerful natural instinct and desire of most women, although, ironically, it manifests itself (and most forcefully so) *after* a woman conceives her first child. This event is transformative: all other instincts and desires forever become subjugated to this new primal instinct.

Clearly, the man has an important role to play, starting with the act of conception. The subsequent phase of "parenting" is tricky and clearly much more important and longer-term than conception. The woman must not plan to raise the child alone for it is a very challenging job which can consume her completely. I think it is important that the responsibility of raising children is shared (because it is so complicated), and that the children get an environment in which they can avail of the natural affection and services of both parents, at least until they reach a certain age (say 18).

Provided that the woman gets to choose her partner, arranged marriage can provide her with the "desirable" kind of genes for conception. For the "parenting" phase, "arranged" marriage has a great chance of success provided the woman views her partner through this lens both while she is looking at prospects and later after marriage. In reality though, women hardly ever think about this aspect while prospecting their husbands and in their subsequent conduct of the marriage. As a result, a lot of marriages break up even before the man has had the opportunity to redeem himself as a father.

With the "parenting" mindset, the whole point (or definition) of "divorce" would change. Even if the man and the woman cannot even "get along", they could continue the association for the children's sake, but with the understanding that each of them is free otherwise.

Some women may object to this idea and say, "You mean I should make a false show to my children that I am happily married when I am not?" This question has an inherent contradiction because a happy marriage, at this point, is the association of two people with the sole purpose of raising their children. It should not be too difficult to be happy raising your own children!

Physical security:

This used to be a necessity in the old days of anarchy, lawlessness, and wars. Even today, if the societal systems cannot provide the woman with a safe living environment, the woman would have to seriously consider living with a man as a mitigating alternative.

Financial support:

This used to be another very important reason in the olden days for women to get married. Even today many women might find this angle very attractive even if they were pursuing their own careers and earning a living, since financial support creates possibilities for them to take breaks (for example during pregnancy and childbirth) and also for providing better parental care to their children.

Typically, arranged marriage does quite well on this count, since the husband's financial qualifications can be (and are indeed) carefully verified by everyone beforehand.

Companionship:

Every woman, indeed every human being, desires and would heartily welcome the company of someone who is caring, supportive, and possibly entertaining. This factor probably becomes more important as the woman gets older or when her children have left her nest.

Most arranged marriages, if they last, eventually end up in a state in which, probably out of sheer necessity, because both partners are tired of their other adventures and misadventures in life, the husband and wife become more caring and supportive partners.

"Enjoyable" or "entertaining" companionship is impossible and unreasonable to expect at this late stage since the long years of cohabitation wears the couple out, but even in the initial stages of the marriage it is purely a matter of chance.

Fringe benefits:

There are several "bonus" reasons, i.e. things that the woman does not necessarily "need" but can possibly "benefit" from, for which the woman might consider living with a man. The "male perspective" on various day-to-day (and other) matters is one which the woman can find useful. The simplistic approach of men, such as in emotional matters, can provide a refreshing alternative. Some women may object if I say that men and women are different, but, I do believe there are differences – whether due to biology, culture, upbringing, or whatever. And these differences in outlook, way of thinking, way of living, etc. can be of some value to the woman who is living with the man.

Arranged marriage is perfectly capable of offering these fringe benefits so long as the couple is able to build a mutually respectful connection between them.

Why do marriages fail?

Failure need not mean only divorce or separation; even an unhappy marriage is essentially a failed marriage. There are umpteen reasons why a marriage, or any relationship for that matter, can fail. I will just try to list a sample.

Infidelity:

Most women cannot accept the lecherous nature of men. "Infidelity" is probably the #1 cause of failed marriages. Of course, men do not have a monopoly in this area, but they are certainly the dominant player.

There is no solution, workaround, or "preventive medicine" for this problem. Women who expect complete and permanent loyalty and commitment from their partners should probably not live with men at all. Only the truly enlightened women – that is, women who understand and accept this unpleasant but natural reality about men – will be able to figure out their own solution.

Loss of freedom:

In the old days, the wife was practically viewed as property of the husband. Indeed, even today men in many cultures and countries continue with this attitude, albeit in a different garb. The woman is expected to "share" everything, report on her daily activities, keep no secrets, meet no other male friends, and so on. Arranged marriage is the most likely victim of this problem.

It is entirely up to the woman to decide how far she is willing to forego her freedom in return for whatever other benefits she is receiving in her marriage.

The in-laws:

The gang of "in-laws" (led of course by the legendary mother-in-law) makes the woman's life difficult when they try to interfere. They often encroach upon the woman's freedom in areas such as childbirth, parenting, and religious practice. Arranged marriage is obviously once again the most likely victim of this disease.

A possible workaround for this problem is for the woman to propose to the in-laws that they face each other as an "opportunity" (to make new friends) rather than as "threat". She must also not come in the way of her partner continuing with his old connections and relations in whatever manner he wants, because that is really none of her business.

Poor understanding of relationships:

Relationships of all types are subject to all kinds of dangers to which marriage is especially susceptible because it is burdened with so many expectations. I have gone into some depth below for one of these dangers (the "new chapter" syndrome) which is more pertinent to marriages. Read my article on relationships to find out more. (See references below)

The "new chapter" syndrome:

In most cultures, marriage (whether arranged or love) is a big deal. Instead of it being a simple union of man and woman, it is painted as a "new chapter", a "new beginning", and what not. Families, relatives, and friends on both sides jump into the fray, making it a complicated community affair. The wedding ceremony is a hugely expensive and lengthy endeavor for which both parents (especially the woman's parents) spend a ton of money and time. The system of "dowry" can make the situation even worse.

With this type of "serious" investment, there is a much bigger burden on the woman to "make the marriage work". She then feels obliged to make a series of compromises, swallow insults, and generally cut the man a much wider slack than he deserves. Inevitably, the marriage then degenerates into an unhappy association for the woman.

One obvious solution to this syndrome is to make the marriage a less complicated affair and the wedding a less expensive event. It is natural for the woman to want to celebrate the beginning of this new chapter in her life with pomp and protocol, but she must see the danger in doing so. She should at least avoid making her parents spend on the wedding so that there is no obligation for her to "make it work" or fulfill their expectations.

Conclusion:

As the foregoing discussion shows, the decision to get into an arranged marriage is not an easy one.

First of all, every woman must come to this experience from a position of strength – with self-confidence and self-respect. She must be open-minded to this new experience but also have a good sense of what is not negotiable.

There is no need for her to view the marriage as some major, irreversible, radical, permanent event. Yes, it is a beautiful and most welcome event. But, it is a continuation of life. Everything that was true and important for the woman thus far – her relatives, friends, hobbies, creative activities – continue to be equally true and important henceforth too.

The woman must also understand the difference between "hope" and "expectation" when it comes to her attitude towards living with her man. Hope may at worst lead to disappointment and sadness. Failed expectation leads to anger, vengefulness, and stress, because there is a built-in certainty – a sense of being in control – in expectation. So, it's ok to be hopeful about all the good things – permanence, love, etc. But, given her awareness of all the things discussed above, she should have close to zero expectation.

If marriage is viewed as just another adventure – even an opportunity (and not a birthright) – with high hopes but no firm expectation, it is more likely to turn out to be a joyful experience as long as it lasts!

How would a wise woman decide?

I hope the above discussion would be useful to any woman. But, before I close, I am tempted to include a paragraph on how a wise woman might look at this whole affair of arranged marriage.

Of course, this is *my* opinion on how an enlightened woman might look at this whole matter. In other words, a woman who thinks as described below is "enlightened" in my opinion!

- First of all, she would have the awareness of her true needs and a good understanding of the nature of relationships in general. She would at least delay marriage until she does.
- She might consider living apart as a free woman even if she has found a decent partner, at least until she decides to have a family.
- She would not marry due to any external pressure – of parents or anyone else.
- She would not marry for financial or personal security or simply because she is getting old.
- She would marry a man whom she is attracted to, and who seems independent, respectful, generous, and caring.

- She does not believe in "happily ever after" and is willing to live through the transformations with an open mind.
- She would leave a bozo as soon as she sees one. "Bozo" is a man that is disrespectful, selfish, possessive, or dominating.
- She knows it is foolhardy to pin all her hopes and expectations on one man.
- While she keeps her mind open to meaningful and/or enjoyable relationships with men, she would pursue a rich life of her own – one that is focused on health, self-awareness, self-reliance, creativity, motherhood, and friendships.

Appendix:

Additional recommended reading:

1. [Keys to Feminine Happiness](#)
2. [About friendships and relationships](#)

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