

Romantic Love and Marriage

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Note: Everything I say below is only my opinion, which is based on my own experiences and observations. – Swami Devanand

Life Puzzle Question:

- 1- Is it okay for a woman to love other men while being a caring wife?
- 2- Is it okay for a woman to find love outside her marriage?
- 3- Is it okay for a woman to have multiple lovers?
- 4- How can a sexually unfulfilled married woman realize her romantic impulses?

Discussion:

I will divide this discussion into two sections. In the first, we will address the *average* woman. In the second, we will see how the issues pertain to the *enlightened* woman. Also, in both cases, I will restrict the discussion to heterosexual women, precisely because the questions above relate to heterosexual women.

It is clear to me that every woman has the potential for (or you may say energies for) the following:

- Romance (which includes sexual intimacy)
- Motherhood
- Creativity

There may be other potentials, but we will focus on these three. To experience overall fulfillment as a woman, she needs to find fulfillment of these potentials (or outlets for these energies).

The contribution of the *masculine energy* for the first two potentials is evident. Even for the third one, masculine involvement is critical if not essential. In fact, I would argue that all these potentials are interdependent. Fulfillment as a lover amplifies creativity, creativity helps motherhood, romance makes motherhood enjoyable, and so on.

In addition to these potentials, the *average* woman also needs a sense of protection, a sense of safety, a sense of financial support, a sense of companionship. We will call all these things with the phrase "Safety blanket", which she typically expects from a man.

In an ideal world, the woman would be free to explore different avenues for the fulfillment of these potentials. So, for example, she would be free to explore a romantic relationship with one man, a reproductive relationship (i.e. to father her child) with another man, a creative collaboration with a third one, and so on. I think a woman certainly has the capacity to have

multiple such relationships. She may even have multiple romantic relationships. Only the practicality of managing such relationships (can she do justice to each one, can she give enough time to each one) would be the constraint on how many she can have at a time. To keep matters simple, it might be sensible for her to have one truly meaningful and fulfilling romantic relationship at a time. So let's eliminate Q.3 from our list.

To be clear, I do not find anything wrong – morally or otherwise – with the possibilities described above. That's why I call it the "ideal world".

In such an ideal world, there would be no jealousy or domination, no revenge or retribution. In such a world, a woman would not be punished if she loved multiple men or if she lived with her husband (the father of her child) and had a romantic relationship with another man.

But, we do not live in an ideal world, nor does it seem likely that we will see one any time soon.

The woman in the real world, thus needs to be smart (even devious – in a good way) in finding ways to fulfill her potentials. Marriage is one way that every woman hopes to find the fulfillment of all three – at least the first two – potentials. Marriage was also invented to provide the woman the "safety blanket", in exchange for which she offers services such as childcare, cooking, housekeeping, and sex. If a woman is lucky she would get all these things (i.e. safety blanket, romance, and motherhood) in a marriage. Then, there is no real need for her to explore more relationships with men, although for the sake of "adventure" (which is another type of potential/energy) she might do that.

Most marriages do well in terms of the *safety blanket* and *motherhood*. The woman gets the sense of protection, financial support, sense of companionship, and children. If she doesn't even get these things, the marriage is quite meaningless (there are several other reasons for which a marriage may become meaningless, but that is a different topic). In my opinion, even if the romance (and sexual fulfillment) is missing, it may be worthwhile to consider continuing the marriage because it meets several other needs. Indeed I feel the purpose of marriage should not include the mandatory fulfillment of the romantic potential, not because such fulfillment is unreasonable, but because it is a matter of chance.

Actually, most marriages fall short on the romantic/sexual front. They either start out as unromantic (e.g. arranged marriages) or become unromantic very quickly. The woman then ends up in a situation where an important part of her life (the romantic/sexual potential) is left hanging.

So, what should she do about her unfulfilled romantic needs?

There is no single, simple answer. I think it all depends on each woman: how much she values this aspect in her life, how much courage she has to acknowledge the importance of its fulfillment, how much appetite she has for adventure, how much risk she is willing to take.

The system of marriage puts constraints on her ability to engage in other romantic relationships. The society and the husbands too, expect that she would not have romantic relationships with other men. Marriage is like a contract in which the woman is expected to give custody of her body and heart to her husband.

For these reasons, it is difficult for a woman to find a suitable solution to her predicament. If she has an extra-marital relationship she risks losing the "safety blanket" of the marriage. If the husband cannot be persuaded that she is not being irresponsible to him and to her family duties by having a lover (and in fact a satisfying love relationship strengthens her abilities as wife and mother), she risks losing the safety and protection of the family. This is an important risk to evaluate vis a vis the benefits/joys of a love relationship.

And this is an important point. Women who haven't experienced a healthy, respectful and caring romantic relationship, don't really know what its worth is, how it can totally transform their life, how the release of their sexual energy can have tremendous impact on their health, energy, enthusiasm, creativity, and overall well-being, how the relationship can actually help relieve other stresses of life, such as, challenges of motherhood, how the romance can act like a charger (using a modern-day analogy), and so on. Without the benefit of these insights, it is understandable that they prefer to stay with the obvious and well-understood security of a marriage.

To be clear, I find nothing wrong or immoral if the woman explores extramarital avenues for her romantic/sexual fulfillment, because it is such a significant part of her life. It is perfectly ok from my perspective for a woman to love another man while being a caring wife; it is perfectly okay for her to seek love outside her marriage.

But like I said above, whether to pursue such adventure is up to each woman. Indeed most women take the safer route of staying focused on the marriage and ignoring the missing romance component.

What about the "enlightened" woman? Of course, this is my own definition of enlightened woman.

An enlightened woman is no different in terms of her potentials and in terms of the valuable role men can play in her life. She has full recognition and understanding of these things. But, she does not view her potentials as needs, but simply as opportunities for living a rich life. She does not pursue or seek men for her fulfillment, but she rather stays alert to possibilities of making interesting connections with men. Indeed, she knows that a true romantic relationship happens not by planning, but by chance. The enlightened woman does not get trapped in any exclusive relationship and thereby sacrifice her freedom. She is confident and secure about herself so that she does not give a fig for the so-called "safety blanket". She is sensible and careful about keeping her various relationships and connections independent and apart, but she

is not fearful about the reactions and perceptions of people and about events out of her control. She has the courage to do things that she truly believes in. As a result, she may have fewer but much more meaningful and enriching connections with people, because only sensible people would be able to sustain her standard.

So, several things I supported for the average woman also apply to the enlightened woman, i.e. it is perfectly ok for her to love another man while being a caring wife; it is perfectly okay for her to find love outside her marriage. The difference is, the enlightened woman would do these things NOT purposely or with intention, but with an alert and open mind. She would do these things not because they meet her needs but because they open up opportunities to enrich her life. She would do these things with care but without fear.