

A Code of Conduct for Ministers and Civil Servants? Just Watch out!

If we make a list of topics we have been discussing at parties, receptions and small get-togethers during past two weeks, the reported move by the government to prepare a code of conduct for officials, starting with ministers, would be somewhere near the top.

In fact, all other topics on the list — the so-called talking points — also related to the activities of the government and the political parties. Listening to friends and acquaintances — it can be rather relaxing if one can only put a couple of questions without being asked any — I could not help wondering whether the government has an overpowering hold on our entire thinking process or we have become a

Prime Minister and an authoritarian one, with the late Indira Gandhi or Margaret Thatcher serving as a model.

However, there will be others who will propose how, without weakening the office of the Prime Minister, there can be increased decentralisation, of power to promote grassroots development throughout the country, more delegation of authority to individual ministers and a greater sense of collective responsibility at the cabinet level than seems to be the case today. They may also say, with much justification, that while technocrats, including civil servants, play a major role in running the administration, the country is

SINCE his first film, *Pather Panchali*, discovered in Cannes in 1956, Satyajit Ray held his place among the greatest filmmakers of the world.

He was also the only Indian filmmaker known in the West outside specialised circles. However, Satyajit Ray was less Indian than Bengalee, he always lived and worked in this region, and made all his films in this language, except the *'Chess Players'*, done in Urdu. And his films have hardly anything in common with the gigantic melodramatic productions and mythological frescoes from the studios of a sub-continent, which by its quantity remain the largest factory of films of the planet. Venerated in Bengal, famous in the world, he was little known elsewhere in India.

Recounting his first experience of making a film, Ray, the intellectual filmmaker, wrote, how he learnt his first lesson, from the World of Doyjenko, whatever admiration one may have from this moonlit night dante but from the earth, from the soil of his own country — supposing of course that his story find its roots in his own land.

The roots of Satyajit Ray



More a Bengali than an Indian

MY WORLD

S.M. Ali

little obsessed with what goes on along the corridor of power. May be both.

Most people talk about this code of conduct in a mixture of cynicism, doubts and, surprisingly, a degree of optimism, with their views falling into three categories: serious, not so serious and light (if not flippant).

Those who take this matter seriously are aware that some Asian countries have indeed drawn up codes of conduct for government officials, starting with ministers, even if they tend to be broken from time to time. After all, it is better to have a code than to have none at all.

Here is a good example from Malaysia. Some time in the early eighties, Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad made it obligatory for all government officials and cabinet ministers (including himself) to wear name tags in copper (just the name, without any position or designation) and to punch his or her arrival and departure times on a clock at the office entrance, a system that Dr Mahathir himself launched by punching his own attendance card. By and large, the two practices have proved both durable and successful, although one may assume that the Prime Minister and other ministers do often "forget" to punch their office attendance cards.

There are other provisions, many dealing with members of the public, in codes observed in such countries as Singapore, Thailand and, of course, Malaysia. A lot of importance is attached to the question of courtesy to visitors at government offices and to the need for promptness in handling complaints from members of the public. When there are signs of slackness in the observance of these provisions, campaigns are launched to give officials a little push to follow the code.

We do not know yet whether the proposed code of conduct in Bangladesh will go as far as to cover the provisions mentioned above. If it does not, we will talk about some amendments in due course.

It is said that what the government is particularly concerned about is putting together a set of rules relating to such matters as accountability, discipline and the chain of command involving senior officials and even cabinet ministers.

On all these issues, there is no shortage of ideas, some innovative ones but some borrowed from the ousted regime of Hussain Muhammad Ershad. They may also overlap, since, to a large extent, they will come from the same source, the bureaucracy.

Some will suggest how the code can strengthen the office of the Prime Minister, and make it as powerful as it can be within the framework of parliamentary democracy. A few will see little difference between a strong

political mandate, in running their ministers, in formulating the policies and in carrying out their projects. Here, opinions will be divided. I share the view that there are more grounds for optimism than reasons for pessimism about what we can expect from individual cabinet colleagues — I use the term 'colleagues' deliberately — of Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia. After all, their failure will be the failure of the parliamentary system as a whole. This is something we do not want to accept — yet.

If a seemingly simple subject like the proposed code of conduct for people in the administration raises all these complex issues, it also evokes thoughts in a somewhat lighter vein, as we discovered during a conversation with some friends the other evening.

Whatever, may be put into a written code of conduct, there should be an unwritten one which too should be carefully followed. The written one should be framed by every Minister (and Secretary) and placed on the wall; the unwritten one should be learnt by heart by all concerned.

Here are a few provisions from the unwritten code of conduct.

The number of ministers accompanying the Prime Minister on a visit to any part of the country should be limited to two (the PM has the discretion to raise it to three), the number of party MPs to four and that of non-MP BNP workers who must travel at their own expense to seven.

Before the Prime Minister undertakes any such trip, formal invitations should be issued to all opposition parties to send their representatives to join the PM's party. Their acceptance of the offer should be duly publicised; their refusal should be kept out of the media through an appropriate "advice note" from the Principal Information Officer.

Any opposition MP joining the PM's party should be excused from taking part in any canal digging project.

In the likely event of the trip being covered by the Bangladesh Television (BTV), strict protocol should be maintained in the allocation of time among various leaders, major and minor, accompanying the Prime Minister. The matter should be discussed in advance by BTV with the appropriate officials in the Ministry of Information.

Are these thoughts evoked in a lighter vein? I wonder. Maybe we can no longer be light hearted about anything connected with the government. What a pity. We should try again — next time.

African Eyes Bring Better Images

GI RAPPES silhouetted against a Serengeti sunset; dappled light through palm fronds on a Banjul beach; the fly-covered face of an Ethiopian child nuzzling hopelessly to its mother's flaccid breast.

These are the surf-and-de-spair images which have built up the common perception of Africa as a continent of extremes. And however vivid the colours, the photographs are almost invariably white on black, of black Africa seen through white eyes.

What would we see if the

into Focus

by David Clare

cameras were put in the hands of ordinary Africans? What would the images be if they were black on black?

Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO), a British aid organisation which sends men and women to share their skills with people in the developing world, has tried to redress the imbalance with their "Images of Africa" exhibition at the

Institute of Education in London.

The stereotypes which have emerged over the years, and the prevailing negative bias, have understandably caused frustration and anger among many Africans, who have rarely had the chance to present their views on a richly diverse continent.

The aim of the Images of Africa project was to give Africans the opportunity to photograph subjects which are important to them and which they would like people in Britain to see.

Says Jane Talbot, Head of Public Education for VSO: "A lot of work in development education involves the use of photographs to get people to think more deeply about developing countries and to challenge stereotyped images."

"Although there were already many photographs available, many were becoming out of date and, in any case, were all taken by whites."

I felt VSO, with its contacts throughout the world, should be able to come up with a better package of pictures."

Some years ago Jane was put in touch with John Forte, a British photo-journalist, who had been to The Gambia and taken along several cameras with which he had asked local people to take photographs of their own communities.

"This linked in very much with what I had been thinking," says Jane. "We then discussed at VSO how we could broaden out the idea to produce a photo pack for development education groups sessions and we eventually decided to focus on African countries in which VSO is working."

VSOs in-country were asked to seek the participation of their colleagues, friends or neighbours — all novice photographers given just one roll of black and white film and loaded cameras by the VSOs.

Films were returned to VSO headquarters in London for processing and contact prints were then sent to the photographers to write their own captions and to select which pictures they would like exhibited.

The result is a collection of more than 400 photographs, representing images from, 11

of the 15 African countries where VSO operates, and a cross-section of 27 have been selected for the exhibition.

"I had hoped we would get a lot of stereotype-shattering images," admits Jane. "The reality is that we have got something more important — a set of photographs of family, friends, scenery, life in the community."

"They are precisely the sort of subjects we might take ourselves in Britain, although obviously some of the images in the exhibition are striking and surprising for people who have not been to Africa."

"It is this similarity, this representation of ordinary life, which is important in showing that people are the same throughout the world. The value of the exhibition is also in addressing the issue of racism and representation, of allowing black people to speak for themselves."

"This has been very much an experiment and, because of the logistical problems, it has taken two years to come to fruition. However, there is clearly tremendous scope for developing the project further."

"Apart from taking the exhibition to Britain's various regions, we are seeking funding and collaborators to put together photo packages as an important development education resource for schools, colleges, photographic and art students, and in our own training for VSO recruits."

Every one of the exhibition's images contains a message for the Western world.

One of the photographs by Evelyn Nkrumah-Mills, on Ghana, shows a woman grinding pepper, tomatoes and onions on a stone.

Evelyn explains that the woman prefers the taste and texture of food prepared in this way, even though there is an electric blender in her house.

McCloud Mawwayar, of Malawi, has produced an effectively simple portrait of "Mr Chando on the telephone." Yet how many people imagine such everyday things as public telephone booths when they think on Africa?

And Veronica Opendi, of Uganda, shows that it is the same the whole world over by photographing her mother and

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The filmmaker Satyajit Ray died in Calcutta

The Giant of Bengal

by Jean-Michel Fronzon Translated from French by Arshad-uz Zaman

went deep into the land of Bengal, in the Ganges valley as in the pavements of Calcutta. It went deep into the rich culture of his motherland, enriched by the example of his grandfather, writer, designer, editor and printer and his painter father, who was also a photographer, poet and translator (of Lewis Carroll for example).

His father died when Satyajit was two years old, but one of his friends had a decisive influence on his upbringing: Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore, who used to visit the Ray family. Student of the very English Presidency College until 1940, the young Satyajit then became student of Santiniketan, founded by Tagore to promote the Indian culture, under full British colonial domination. The filmmaker has devoted a homage-film to Tagore and adapted several of his stories (*Charulata*, *Three Women*, *the House and the World*).

Admirer of Jules Verne and Tintin

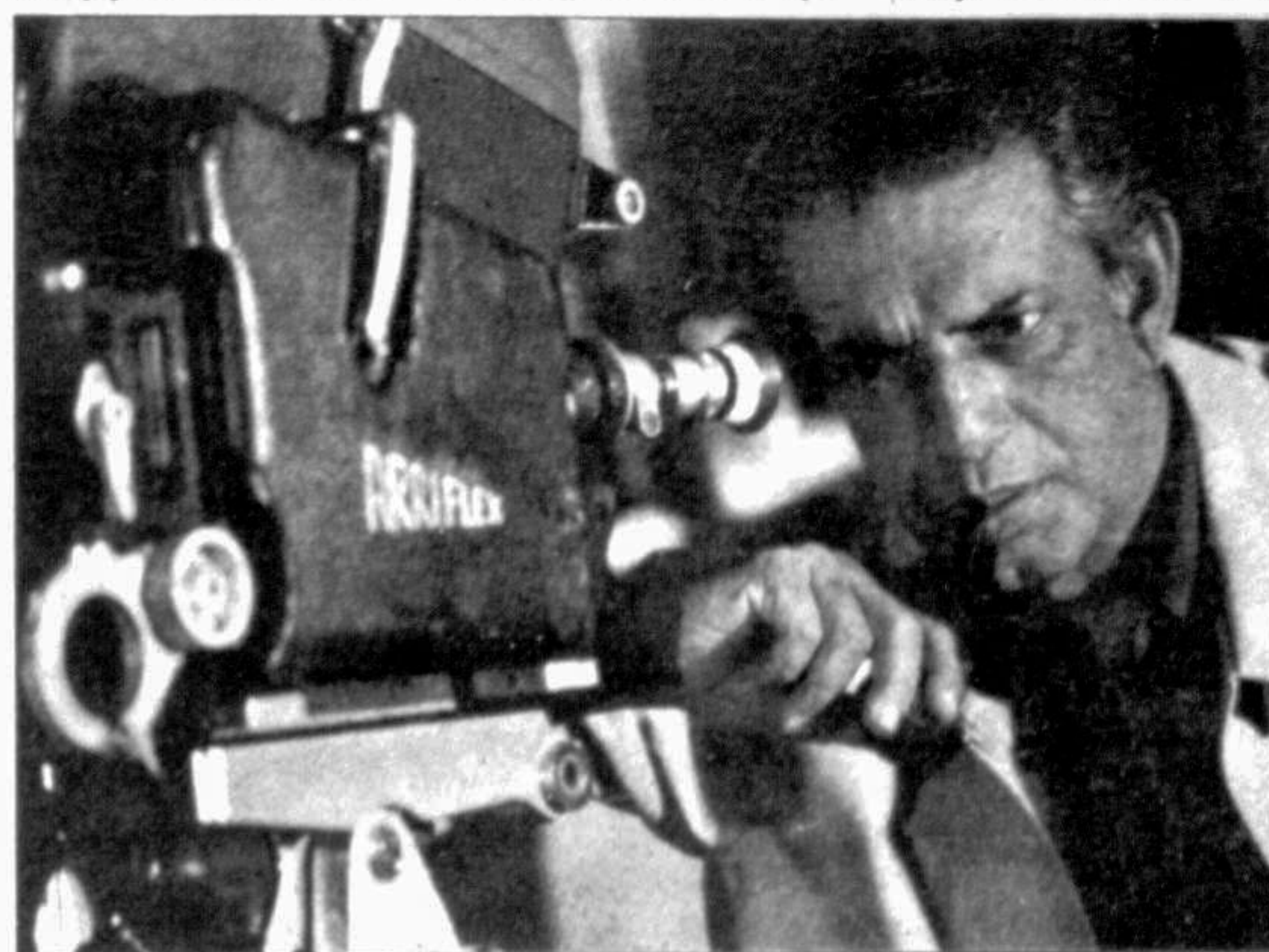
He described himself "a Bengali enriched by English culture", which was exact but too narrow. He knew British literature well, but admired Jules Verne, Edgar Poe and ... Tintin. And he never failed to cite as cinematographic reference Frank Capre and John Ford, and the portrait of Einstein adorned his house on Bishop Leroy Road in Calcutta. He decided to make films after seeing *'Bicycle Thief'* and went into action after a conversation with Joan Renoir, who came to India to make the film *'River'*.

He was then a lithographer in an English publicity firm in Calcutta, D J Keymer, "who was trying to give an Indian look to Western products" — but also the founder of the first cine-club created in India in 1947, the year of independence. He loved drawing and remained one throughout his life. He revived the magazine founded by his grandfather — *'Sandesh'*, in order to publish stories for children and adolescents, good for all age groups.

He was a musician as well and he composed music for all his films since 1961 (after Ravi

Shankar, Ustad Vilayat Ali Khan and Ali Akbar Khan gave him a hand in his first films) — an impassioned musician of Western classical as well as traditional music, serious or popular, as could be seen from his music of the film *'Branches of the Tree'*. The entire work of Satyajit could have one sin-

gled title — one of his most beautiful films, *'the House and the World'* so much of it is impregnated with the dialogue of his profound attachment to his motherland and his hunger for the world beyond. Perfect marriage of authenticity and universality.



The filmmaker

gle title — one of his most beautiful films, *'the House and the World'* so much of it is impregnated with the dialogue of his profound attachment to his motherland and his hunger for the world beyond. Perfect marriage of authenticity and universality.

Each film of Satyajit Ray could be encapsulated in ten lines. Each one of them forms links among the personalities, between personalities and the natural decor or that of the city life, between family or sentimental anecdotes and vast social settings, between 'little story of no significance' and cosmic symbolism. They look so simple to tell and yet they open political, moral, spiritual and esthetic horizons that one never finishes exploring.

Whether it shows the im-

portance of tradition without ever submitting to the oppression, — a bitter enemy of division by caste, submission of women and religious fanaticism. All his life he watched the West with its modernism which he knew well. Progressive, close to the Communist Party, to which he never belonged, he refused materialism, too fascinated by the mystery of the world, even more fascinated by the mystery of the Man.

Branches of the Tree'. Last year he made the film *'Visitor'*, produced as the previous film with the moral and financial support of Gerard Depardieu and Daniel Toscani de Plantier. Played by his favourite artiste Soumitra Chatterjee 'Innocent' and *'Branches of the Tree'* heralded the approaching end. Lucid, Satyajit Ray knew that the place held by cinema in his country was due to the development, slower than elsewhere, of television, and that it would not last. Whoever crossed him knew that he was every tall, nearly two metres. Whoever saw his film knew that he was a giant. Tomorrow, Bergman and Fellini, Godard and Kurosawa will feel a little more lonely.

By arrangement with the Le Monde, Paris

The Journey of Mr B

Continued from Page 9 lamenting over anyone's death but over the possibility of a death. "Who is he or she? I want to see," insisted the young man with rage. "O you cannot see! There are more things on earth and heaven than your eyes can see....." "Stop philosophizing at this moment you see my uncle is

bleeding. If something serious happens to him, I will" Mr B's ears got heated and throat parched, and with a feeling of half-formed guilt, he started running away, but Mr. B did not know where he was going; yes, there was speed but no destination, felt Mr B in the fashion of Lord Jim who clinched the point well that

man is a mystery not a master piece. While running, Mr B found a couple of black dogs chasing him and this chase added impetus to his momentum but he stumbled against a rock and woke up with a start from his nightmare. It was midnight and he found his wife sleeping and heard her snoring. "Should I leave home tomorrow to join them all?" This question began to haunt Mr B.

WRITE TO MITA

Dear Mita,

I am in love with my niece (cousin's daughter). We had this relationship for quite a long time, but nobody in our families agrees. Recently after receiving pressure from the elders I decided to cut off every relationship with her and told her about it. It wasn't an easy task telling her, it took a lot of courage. The reason I took such a decision is because if we want to make our dreams come true then we'll call upon a big fight between our families and which neither she nor I want. But it's very hard to stick to such a decision though I'm trying my best. I'm afraid I can't just be a friend to her and no matter how hard I try, my friendship will end up in loving her again. My love for her will only give her pain and tears and I don't want that for her. To be honest, I'm a man and it is much easier for me to handle this than her. I'm very worried about her but can't help it. I do love her very much and really want us to be together. Please advise.

Anonymous, Dhaka.

Dear Anonymous,

This is a very difficult situation and though falling in love with the daughter of a cousin is no crime yet society does not approve of it. We still have to abide by certain norms and live with our families. You have done a brave thing by breaking off the relationship though it must be very hard staying away from each other, for a certain period of time will prove to you both how much you care. As I said before, since there is nothing illegal about this relationship, if after trying your best to stay away from each other you still feel strongly and if you are adults, then take decision which is best for both of you; the family will understand some day.

Dear Mita,

My mother-in-law is always praising her daughters in front of my parents as if they have all the good qualities while I have none. This has upset my parents many times. I have asked my husband to do something about this but he thinks I am making a fuss about a little thing. Well, I don't think it is little specially when my parents feel insulted in my house. What do you think I should do.

Reba, Dhaka.

Dear Reba,

There are few options open for you. Ask your parents to praise you when she is praising her daughters; ask your husband to say something complimentary about you and if that doesn't work, just ask your parents to ignore the whole thing.

Dear Mita,

I am a widow with a three-year old son. I loved my husband and had a very good life with him but he died two years ago in a car accident. I had thought that was the end of my life but slowly I have recovered. Though the pain remains, I have started appreciating life again. I have started studying again and want to build a career. My family and in-laws are eager to see me married again. I know they mean well, but I am not ready yet. There are two kinds of pressures on me. On one hand, I am expected to mourn the death of my husband, on the other, I am expected to get married and start a new life. What should I do? can you please advise.

Anonymous, Dhaka.

Dear Anonymous,

First I want to congratulate you for facing the world as you are doing after such a big tragedy. You are very right in your observation of being pulled in two different directions. Your parents ask you to get married because they want to see you settled before something happens to them. As you said, they mean well but don't realize that it will take time before you can truly share your life with someone else. The other pressure is from people who have nothing better to do and should be totally ignored. You are a sensible matured person. Use your best judgement and do what you think is best for you and your child. Build your career and your self confidence, the rest will follow.

Dear Mita,

Long ago I liked a young woman, in fact I was in love with her. It did not work out and we went our different ways, I got married and am very happy with my wife. After many years I met that woman who is now divorced. I am not certain but I think she would like to revive our relationship. I am not interested, so advise me how I can say no to her without hurting her feelings.

Saiful, Chittagong.

Dear Saiful,

By not hurting her feelings you might end up by hurting your wife's feelings which would be worse. First be sure of the woman's intentions, probably she is just being friendly with an old acquaintance. Remember, just because a woman is divorced does not mean she is out to get the first man who is friendly with her. This is a cruel stereotype and is not true at all. If what you think is true, then just get the point next time you meet and tell her that you are not interested.



Images of Africa