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It's a Match: Shaadi.com, Tinder, and the Fantasy of Frictionlessness

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IT’S A MATCH!

Shaadi.com, 
Tinder, and 
the Fantasy of 
Frictionless-ness

Purvi Rajpuria
In this essay I carry out case studies of Shaadi.com and Tinder to unpack the cultural principles underlying the apps that shape our interpersonal relationships today. I demonstrate that these apps are grounded in a fantasy of frictionless-ness, or the desire to shield the self from discomfort caused by external factors, and argue that this is a fraught cultural ideal. My analysis reveals that a fantasy of frictionless-ness gives birth to a cultural landscape of rampant subjectivity and tepid morality, which hampers our ability to form deep and meaningful connections with each other. Recognising the flaws of such a fantasy, I propose that we ground our personal and political pursuits in a desire for collective and holistic progress instead.
If you have spent any time in one of India’s metropolitan cities, you have probably encountered a large fleet of (mostly) men in brightly coloured brand t-shirts zooming about on their scooters, waiting in restaurants, or standing gathered in a circle at a street-side tea stall. Officially called delivery agents, these men are gig workers at one of India’s many delivery start-ups. These start-ups, such as Swiggy, Zomato, and Urban Clap, offer to deliver goods and services to customer homes. Users can use their app-based interfaces to order food, groceries, medicines, and even parlour services such as facials and manicures to their doorsteps. They promise a lifestyle (to those who can afford it) devoid of waiting in long queues, facing the disappointment of your medicine being out of stock, or sweating your way through a metro ride in the middle of a heatwave.

It’s a Match!

Shaadi.com, Tinder, and the Fantasy of Frictionlessness

Introduction

If you have spent any time in one of India’s metropolitan cities, you have probably encountered a large fleet of (mostly) men in brightly coloured brand t-shirts zooming about on their scooters, waiting in restaurants, or standing gathered in a circle at a street-side tea stall. Officially called delivery agents, these men are gig workers at one of India’s many delivery start-ups. These start-ups, such as Swiggy, Zomato, and Urban Clap, offer to deliver goods and services to customer homes. Users can use their app-based interfaces to order food, groceries, medicines, and even parlour services such as facials and manicures to their doorsteps. They promise a lifestyle (to those who can afford it) devoid of waiting in long queues, facing the disappointment of your medicine being out of stock, or sweating your way through a metro ride in the middle of a heatwave.
These apps eliminate the friction of contending with the outside world by bringing the world to your fingertips. Life is good because everything is now only a click away.

When I came to the US to complete my master’s degree, I noticed that such a lifestyle is far more pervasive here, than in India. My friends all use voice-activated text-dictation to type notes or messages on their phones, rely entirely on the GPS to go from point A to point B, and barely use cash to conduct financial transactions. I was surprised to find that some banks don’t even have physical locations; they are entirely virtual. Less pervasive, but still significant developments include the presence of self-driving cars in several major cities, and the cut-throat competition among big-tech companies to make headway in the artificial intelligence and virtual reality space. Living in the US I not only notice an extreme reliance on automated technology, but also sense a strong collective belief in technology as the answer to all of our problems. In the land of Silicon Valley, there’s no problem than an app can’t solve.

In the introduction to his 2009 book titled *Shop Class as Soulcraft*, political philosopher Matthew B. Crawford uses the term “virtualism” to describe this cultural phenomenon. He writes in the context of a decline in tool use and the diminishing cultural value of skilled labor practices in America. Crawford defines virtualism as: “a vision of the future in which we somehow take leave of material reality and glide about in a pure information economy.” He contrasts the idea of virtualism, or of *gliding about* in a pure information economy, to the experience of making things using material objects, tools, and your bare hands. While the former promises a frictionless world, where you are cushioned from unpredictable forces outside your control, the latter requires you to engage with the rules of the world of material objects. He argues that the experience of making and fixing things with your hands, despite the unpredictability, physical exhaustion, and material risk that surrounds it, is a deeply rewarding one.

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The desire to glide about in a frictionless world—or shield the self from distress caused by external circumstances at all costs—is not limited to our interactions with the material world only; it has deep implications on how we form connections with each other and thus experience the self in society. In this essay, I unpack the implications of striving for frictionless-ness in intimate interpersonal relationships, and its consequences on our ability to form deep and meaningful connections with others. I zero in on the matrimonial website Shaadi.com and the dating app Tinder as two sites of virtualism in practice, and trace their histories to identify the challenges of realising a purely virtual future. Ultimately, I argue that their driving principle of liberating the self from external limitations, and thus friction of any kind, creates an atmosphere of rampant subjectivity and tepid morality, and is thus a fraught cultural ideal.

VIRTUALISM: A VISION OF THE FUTURE IN WHICH WE SOMEHOW take leave OF MATERIAL REALITY AND glide about IN A PURE INFORMATION ECONOMY.
Shaadi.com: A Frictionless Marriage between Modernity and Tradition

A popular ad for Shaadi.com shows the first conversation between a humble young man with a degree in Aerospace Engineering from the US, and a woman with a degree in Home Science. Dressed in a dainty pink salwar suit, the woman reveals that she wants to be a chef. The protagonists of the ad switch comfortably between English and Hindi, not only marking their class, but also their commitment to both, modernity and tradition. While the woman displays her naivete about aerospace engineering by asking her potential match if he has ever been to the moon, the man confesses that the one time he tried his hand at cooking, he made a complete mess out of it. Both are coy but visibly taken by the other’s innocence (ineptitude) in their respective fields of interest. The ad is skillfully crafted; it makes you desire the innocent purity of the budding romance between people from two seemingly different worlds, as they embark on a life-long journey together, and Shaadi.com is the platform that made this happen.

Growing up in the mid-2000s, I remember watching several such ads for Shaadi.com on TV. These ads show liberal, affluent, upper-caste families turning to the matrimonial website to find matches for their children in the changing cultural landscape of modern times. In 2014, Shaadi.com launched a campaign titled #FastforHer, urging men to fast for their wives on Karwa Chauth, just like the wives have traditionally been doing for their husbands. Another ad shows a woman’s parents moving into their daughter’s marital home so that she can continue taking care of them, as opposed to taking care of her husband’s parents. A newer ad, advertising the Shaadi.com app shows a family discussing strategies for rejecting a rishta from a relative’s acquaintance; the ad claims that using the app eliminates these awkward interactions.

Here, Shaadi.com carefully positions itself at the intersection between tradition and modernity. Its users are committed to both: honoring the “Indian” traditions of Karwa Chaut, arranged marriages, and maintaining strong ties with the family; as well as the liberal values of women’s equality both within the home and in the workplace. Unlike the old-fashioned values of traditional matchmakers (think Indian Matchmaking’s Sima Aunty) who ask the woman to compromise at
A CAREFUL POSITIONING OF ITSELF AS liberal yet traditional IS CENTRAL TO SHAADI.COM’S ABILITY TO JUSTIFY ITS NEED IN THE INDIAN MARKET.

every step, Shaadi.com understands the needs of modern women, while continuing to operate within the family-desired framework of arranged marriages. This careful positioning of itself as liberal yet traditional, is not an incidental aspect of Shaadi.com’s marketing. It is central to the service’s ability to justify its need in the Indian market.

However, this fantasy of a friction-less co-existence between the modern and the traditional was not a pre-existing one. Shaadi.com (among other matrimonial sites) has made a concerted effort to manufacture this fantasy over several years of slick marketing, in order to convince the Indian public to move its match-making needs online. Its twenty-year journey since 2001 shows the challenges of carrying out this ambitious, widescale cultural project, and the long-term impacts of such a move.

THE CHALLENGES OF TRANSPOSING MATCHMAKING TO A VIRTUAL PLATFORM

When he first started investing serious energy and resources into the venture in around 2001, founder Anupam Mittal recalls that the Indian subcontinent still had very little internet penetration and limited credit card usage of the sort required for an entirely online service to take off. Moreover, people were concerned about using the internet to find a life partner; there was a stigma surrounding it—the youth considered it “uncool” to find a marriage partner online. Still, Mittal was convinced that the internet held an answer to what he saw as a problem. He believed that Shaadi.com could expand the limited pool of matches that families had access to when working with a matchmaker. In a 2011 interview with American startup entrepreneur Andrew Warner, Mittal says,

It seemed awfully limiting that the choice of your life partner is determined by how many people this person [a traditional matchmaker] knows. So, it made perfect sense, the Internet

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2 Mittal, Anupam. Shaadi.com And One Of India’s Most Powerful Founders. Video, June 17, 2011. https://mixergy.com/interviews/anupam-mittal-shaadi-interview/. All quotes from Mittal and information about Shaadi.com in this section come from this interview.
being sort of a global medium, you know, to get like minded people on the Internet, we’re all looking to do the same thing, and connections will happen.⁵

Convincing the Indian public of the existence of this problem, and of the internet’s ability to solve it took Shaadi.com a long time. Before it could do that, Mittal turned his attention to the non-resident Indian (NRI) market living in large numbers in countries like the US, UK, and Canada. These NRIs were looking to get married within their communities, but unlike people living in India, they did not have easy access to traditional matchmaking services to facilitate this search. The challenges of limited internet penetration and low credit card usage were also less pronounced in these international locations. Mittal used the income from Shaadi.com’s success in the NRI market to sustain his efforts at carving out a space for the venture within India.

This effort involved dismantling the existing cultural structures that acted as roadblocks in Shaadi.com’s path to success. At the time, parents of the potential matches displayed a lack of trust in, and know-how about, the internet. Thus, in 2004 Shaadi.com opened its first physical retail outlet in Mumbai offering matrimonial services in a way that would appeal to the parents’ sensibilities. While these outlets were very similar to existing marriage bureaus, they were connected to each other via a shared online database which centralised and expanded the pool of eligible matches. The retail outlets, initially called Shaadi Point, were not explicit about their relationship with Shaadi.com, for fear of attracting the stigma that surrounded online matchmaking. They rebranded themselves to Shaadi.com Center only in around 2007, after Shaadi.com had established a powerful presence in the country, and no longer carried a negative cultural association. Mittal claims that the association with the virtual service was now a helpful one, and served to unify the brand.

Another hurdle for Mittal was the role of trusted astrologers in the matchmaking process. Around the same time as when he launched the retail outlets, Mittal launched an online horoscope service called Astrolife.com in order to create a centralised service that replaced the relevance of the disorganised and scattered presence of in-person astrologers. However, this venture did not succeed.

In the same interview with Warner, Mittal makes the astute observation that it was a “trust issue”. He explains, “It’s like saying, you know, would you give up your doctor and go to a website which offers medical advice, and print out a prescription and go buy the drugs? You wouldn’t do that, right? Because you trust your doctor, that’s why you go to them. You think of them as an expert who knows more beyond what technology can do.” Even Mittal, despite his immense faith in the digital world’s ability to surpass the efficiency of existing cultural systems, could not at the time make the big ask of having people place their trusts—a deeply subjective feeling developed over time due to a mix of unquantifiable factors—in pure data. He concedes, “there was no way we could, sort of, replace the astrologer with an automated astrology report or horoscope-generating engine.”⁶

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⁵ Ibid. (emphasis mine).

⁶ Ibid.
However, over time, with the help of an aggressive and relentless marketing campaign, Shaadi.com began to find a footing in the country’s urban and semi-urban populace. It had several things going for it. Despite its liberal positioning, Shaadi.com is deeply entrenched in the country’s caste norms that form the pulse of the arranged-marriage system. When a user sets up a profile on the website, they encounter an extensive survey of personal questions that ranges from the user’s height and annual income to their caste, religion, and sub-community. The website even allows users to upload their horoscope reports, an important set of details used by families when deciding on a suitable match for their children. This reassures users of Shaadi.com’s commitment to honouring traditional value systems, and thus of their ability to find matches online without compromising on their beliefs.

The careful towing of the line between tradition and the liberal beliefs has won Shaadi.com an extensive user base, at the cost of traditional matchmaking practices, such as marriage bureaus and community arranged matches.

With Shaadi.com at your fingertips, it now seems foolish to pay marriage bureaus to find you a match, when you could access an unlimited pool online, for free. Additionally, Shaadi.com liberates you from the hassle of having to contend with the old-fashioned beliefs of your family members or matchmakers. Thus, Shaadi.com promised not only the fantasy of a frictionless marriage of liberal and traditional beliefs (as depicted in the advertisements), but also the fantasy of a frictionless experience of searching for a life-partner, devoid of uncomfortable conversations with people who held contending beliefs.
But frictionlessness, although convenient in the moment, is often overwhelming, exhausting, and ineffective in realising long-term goals. Today, Shaadi.com boasts of several paid features that offer the same benefits that were the defining qualities of pre-existing cultural matchmaking structures. Its Select Shaadi feature, available at a high premium, gives users access to a dedicated advisor who vets the matches for them, limiting the match pool that Shaadi.com has tried for so long to expand. It brings the friction of interacting with a human matchmaker back into the matchmaking process. However, by charging a premium for it, Shaadi.com turns this feature into a privilege available only to a select few.

Over the last twenty years Shaadi.com has justified its persistence, despite the many cultural barriers that stood in its way, based on the implicit understanding that frictionless matchmaking is the desired mode of the establishing long-term intimate relationships. In presenting itself as the most viable option for finding a match in modern times, it attempts to strike a chord with the liberal sentiment against pre-existing cultural practices on the grounds that they are old-fashioned. And yet, premium features such as Select Shaadi, that employ the same strategies as traditional match-making practices, bring the effectiveness of frictionless-ness matchmaking into question. Even as it harks on the need for women’s equality in its marketing material, Shaadi.com displays a commitment to the caste norms of arranged marriage practices in its user interface. This raises the question of whether modern and traditional values can co-exist in meaningfully intimate relationships, or whether the fantasy of frictionless-ness is exactly what the name suggests—a farce that is grounded in the desire to shield the self from uncomfortable interactions with the people we love.

Above
A list of premium features available at an additional cost on Shaadi.com under the banner of Shaadi Select. The website also allows for multiple tiers of membership such as Gold, Gold Plus, Diamond, etc., that unlock premium features. These features are available within and outside India.
Tinder and the Fantasy of Endless Choice

TINDER’S ARRIVAL IN INDIA

The slowly growing foothold of matrimonial websites in India had may have laid the groundwork for the entry and wide success of dating apps in the country today. But a closer precedent that set up the rise of dating apps in the country is the parallel ecosystem of high social media usage among the country’s urban youth starting from the mid-2000s, which introduced and normalised the concept of forming social relationships online. In her 2019 essay about the rise of India-centric dating apps, Vaishnavi Das notes that before dating apps entered Indian markets, dating websites in India had little presence. Instead, Indians used online chatrooms such as Yahoo and MSN, and messaging services on social networking platforms such as Orkut, Hi5 and Facebook, to forge connections, not always explicitly aimed at marriage, but often intimate in nature. Das cites Kabita Chakraborty’s observation of these online spaces: “through theme-based rooms, like love and friendship rooms, chat services participants interested in developing romantic and other relationships could meet, communicate and share various multimedia information, including photos and videos of themselves.” This helped normalise the act of looking beyond our immediate social circles to form intimate connections.

Grindr, a phone-based gay male dating app that matched people based on geographic proximity, was launched in March 2009. By 2011, it had expanded its user-base to India, where it also faced competition from other international gay male geo-social dating apps. Tinder, a primarily heterosexual dating app which used many of the same interface design strategies as Grindr, was launched in 2012; it entered the Indian app-based dating landscape in 2013, as part of its efforts at global expansion. In 2014, the Indian edition of the Wall Street Journal published a commentary section observing how Indians were “ditching” their blackberries to get on iPhones that supported the app. At the same time, numerous India-focused dating apps such as TrulyMadly, DesiCrush, Woo, icrushiflush were launched by nonresident Indian entrepreneurs targeting the Indian market, each claiming that they held the key to answer the question of what Indians were looking for in non-marriage-based intimacy. This back-and-forth between general versus niche audiences is a key issue that major players in the online dating industry are wrestling with in both, the global and Indian markets.

EARLY MOTIVATIONS BEHIND THE DEVELOPMENT OF TINDER

Talking to the hosts of the podcast “Land of the Giants”, Tinder co-founder Jonathan Badeen recalls the teams’ early vision for the app. Having watched the iPhone’s userbase grow exponentially within the US since its launch in 2007, the founders wanted to create a mobile based dating application that was unencumbered by the workings of existing desktop-based dating websites such as Match.com (launched in 1995), eHarmony (launched in 2000), and OkCupid (launched in 2004). To create a mobile first app, Tinder’s engineers decided to make the following interface changes: 1) They did away with the cumbersome process of creating profiles online by allowing users to login with their Facebook accounts. This automatically synched the users’ photographs and interest with the dating app. 2) While dating websites had encouraged extended conversations between its users, that was modeled on writing emails or letters, Tinder modeled its features along the lines of


6 Quoted in Das.

7 Cited in Das.

8 Ibid.
iMessage. This encouraged shorter and quicker conversations between users, where they could type with one thumb if they wanted. 3) Tinder used users’ location as a key point of attraction. It wasn’t about where the user lived, but where they were at that very moment. This created the impression that your date could be around the corner, no matter where you were. Grindr had figured this feature out a few years back. 4) Most significantly, Tinder introduced the swipe.⁹

The idea for the swipe came to Badeen as he imagined a smart phone user, striding through the college campus, coffee in one hand, smartphone in the other. He recalls,

I had this epiphany one morning...I basically imagined these flashcards on the screen that if you swiped in one direction it would flip the card over, and then I imagined the sort of right and wrong piles of cards. So, when we made Tinder we ended up with something very similar—it was a portrait interface with a stack of cards.¹⁰

While today the vocabulary of “swiping right” (on something you like) and “swiping left” (on something you dislike) has entered a usage beyond the world of dating apps, it was a novel idea for users to engage with apps in this way in 2012. The revolutionary feature of the swipe removed all uncertainty from dating. Unlike dating websites, where anybody could message anybody else, on Tinder, two people matched only if both had swiped right on the other’s profile. This was a massive development in the way people approached and perceived intimate relationships.¹¹

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¹⁰ Ibid. Emphasis mine.
¹¹ Ibid.
Badeen also recalls explicitly referring to the language and interface design of gaming while coming up with the app for Tinder. The screen flashed phrases such as “You’ve got a match!” or “Keep Playing!”, and the buttons at the bottom of the screen were meant to look like those in gaming controllers. In fact, the code itself refers to this section of the app as a “game pad”. The swipe feature allowed users to emote expressively while they decided to match with or reject the profile on their screen. They expressed abhorrence, by swiping fast, they expressed uncertainty, or mild dislike through soft swipes. This all made the process of dating seem fun, just like video game. You could be getting multiple matches or pings every single day, and each such ping gave you a dopamine rush. It was like pulling a lever in a Vegas slot machine. This concerted effort at the “gamification” of dating was driven more by a desire for the app’s success than by the desire to initiate lasting intimate relationships.

Tinder unlocks that part of the human personality that is scared to commit to a person for fear of making the wrong decision, and allows it to run unchecked. By allowing us to browse through profiles endlessly, it creates the impression that our choices are limitless, and the problem of intimate relationships is the problem of “finding the right one”, as opposed to making it work with someone you like. Its gamified design creates a culture of dating that is devoid of consequences, where we can act without worrying about how our actions affect another person because if they don’t like us, there is always someone else waiting around the corner. If an arranged marriage, in its purest sense, is one extreme of spending your life with a partner you have no say over finding; dating on Tinder is the other extreme of being inundated by choice to the extent of being unable to commit to someone that is not tailor made to your needs. If Shaadi.com creates the fantasy of a frictionless marriage between traditional and liberal values; Tinder argues that there should be no place whatsoever for friction in our relationships. Its design seeks to convince us that a relationship is only worth entering into if the two partners are pre-existing puzzle pieces that fit perfectly with each other.

**THE SWIPE REMOVED all uncertainty FROM DATING. THIS WAS A MASSIVE DEVELOPMENT IN THE WAY PEOPLE APPROACHED AND PERCEIVED INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS.**
GROWING CROP OF NICHE APPS

Today, more than ten years after Tinder was first launched, an increasingly large group of people find its list of unfiltered choices overwhelming and exhausting to wade through. People complain of not being able to form long-lasting intimate relationships despite having used the app for several years. As a response to this problem, there is now a growing crop of niche dating apps, both within and outside India, that seek to reinstate some of the limits to the unending pool of choice. Apps such as Muzz (a dating app for Muslim singles), Elite (a dating app for “educated singles”), and Dil Mil (a dating app for South Asian singles around the world), cater to very specific audience, unlike Tinder’s general user pool. These niche apps respond to the awareness that humans need limits to their ability to exercise choice. Although these limits are antithetical to the fantasy of frictionless-ness, they force us to commit to what we have, as opposed to undertaking an endless search for “the perfect fit”. By forming niches on the lines of religion, communities, and educational background, these apps tap into the human desire to make connections within their realms of familiarity. This is oppositional to Tinder’s underlying proposition that true connection can be found by exposing us to options that exist beyond this realm.

Interestingly, the same Shaadi.com, which started with the desire to expand the limited pool of matches known to matchmakers, today presents itself as a niche alternative to Tinder’s general user pool.

In 2015, two years after Tinder entered Indian markets, not only did Shaadi.com release an iPhone app (as opposed being entirely desktop-based), it also carried out a rebranding exercise. While its logo mark continues to be a typographic treatment of the brand name,
Shaadi.com changed its brand colours from the shades of vermillion, ochre, and forest green, to pastel shades of pink and blue. Additionally, the brand replaced the yellow dot—meant to evoke a bindi, to a heart in a circle. Finally, it removed its tagline “The World's Largest Matrimonial Service” from its logo altogether.

These changes point to a concerted attempt by the venture to reposition itself as aligning with the modern and progressive appearance of dating apps, where users choose who they match with, as opposed to entering into a marriage arranged by their families. Its rebranding is part of a larger cultural rebranding of the institution of arranged marriages themselves, where caste, community, and annual income are just another set of data points that exist in the same world as the user data that Tinder collects: such as age, hobbies, and interests.

Even as different apps wrestle with the optimal size of the user pool, and the number of data points users wish to consult before matching with a potential intimate partner, the apps are collectively engaged in a mass flattening project. By existing on the same virtual plane, the apps carry out a flattening of the sociological and cultural factors that determine what data points a user looks at to match with a potential intimate partner. To be on Shaadi.com and make a match that is explicitly guided by caste, versus to be on Tinder and make a match that carries the appearance of being outside the realm of caste, is ultimately seen as a matter of personal preference. That is, to match with someone explicitly along the lines of caste is now the same as matching with someone based on their height, their looks, or their interests. None of these data points carries more sociological weight than the other, because the virtual realm decontextualises the cultural significance of the data, and flattens the hierarchy out of it. Here, as the user navigates this virtual space of online dating, their choices are devoid of the moral weight of satisfying family members or cultural expectations. The guiding morality of these apps tells them that finding the right partner is ultimately about what they want. As the act of finding connection with an intimate partner is liberated from the realm of cultural expectations, sociological codes, and physical proximity, individuals are faced with the critical self-responsibility for finding the right match.
As the user navigates the virtual world of online dating, their choices are devoid of the moral weight of satisfying family members or other cultural expectations. The guiding morality of these apps tells them that finding the right partner is ultimately about what they want.
As our analysis of Shaadi.com and Tinder reveals, the act of finding an intimate partner online is underscored by the belief that the self must be shielded from the friction of wrestling with external factors such as cultural expectations and sociological prescriptions, and the general uncertainty of in-person social interaction. These apps posit that the act of finding connection can escape this friction, only if the self is allowed to exercise its personal choice in an unbridled fashion. While some apps pose limits to the extent of such a choice, by catering to niche audiences and acknowledging the sociological factors that shape user choices, the very act of choosing to sign up on this niche app, is also a matter of personal preference. This widespread prevalence if choice as the dominant form of morality is a departure from traditional social arrangements that were grounded in a strong shared moral code.

In a landscape where personal choice is the most dominant form of morality, we see a rampant sense of subjectivity, that is rooted in the fear of imposing one’s personal beliefs on another.

A relationship advice columnist in The Times of India responds to a reader’s discomfort about his wife roaming around in the house dressed only in her underwear. In his brief entry to the newspaper, he doesn’t describe why it makes him uncomfortable—there is an implicit understanding that it just does. In her response to his question, the advice columnist is wary of granting legitimacy to his discomfort. She doesn’t have the intellectual grounds to do so, without resorting to the conservative argument about the need for women to maintain modesty in their dress. Instead, she asks the reader to introspect on his discomfort with nudity—does he find her naked body unattractive, she says?
Above
Another screenshot from The Times of India. Here, the columnist advises a woman uncomfortable with her husband’s desire to watch pornography together, to avoid judgemental language and strike a compromise with him. The columnist is especially wary of condemning his actions for fear of impinging on his subjectivity.

Second, try to avoid judgmental language and instead focus on how you are feeling. For example, rather than saying “I hate porn,” you could say “I don’t enjoy watching porn.” This will help your husband feel more comfortable opening up about his own views on the subject. Have an authentic communication with him.

Thirdly, be prepared to compromise. If you are struggling to come to an agreement, this doesn’t mean that you have to end the relationship or that there’s anything wrong with either of you as a couple. If your husband enjoys watching porn, maybe there is a way that you can find a middle ground that meets both of your needs. For example, you could agree to watch one video together or look at photos instead of videos. Or maybe, he can watch porn without involving you, or maybe you can watch certain types of porn that don’t make you feel uncomfortable.

Lastly, I would recommend that if you and your husband are looking for a change in perspective or are unable to process the thoughts, emotions, and the unease around the situation, do consider seeking therapy. It might be helpful to consult a therapist who can help you navigate these difficult conversations. Don’t shy away from asking for help. I hope this helps!

Dr. Chandni Tugnait is M.D. (Alternative Medicine), Psychotherapist, Life Coach, Business Coach, NLP Expert, Healer, Founder & Director - Gateway of Healing, with centres in Gurgaon and Faridabad.

While the columnist refrains from making a strong statement supporting or dismissing on his wife’s nudity, she is unable to even acknowledge his discomfort as socially and culturally understandable. She steers completely clear of making a moral judgement about the wife’s decision, for fear of impinging on her personal subjectivity. What right does the columnist, the husband, or anyone else for that matter, have to question the wife’s personal preference?

Similarly, in a different column from the same newspaper, a woman expresses her discomfort with her husband’s desire to watch porn before they engage in sex. The columnist advises: “avoid using judgmental language”, “rather than saying “I hate porn”, you could say “I don’t enjoy watching porn””. Once again, the columnist displays a dogged wariness about condemning the source of her reader’s discomfort, instead she asks the reader to make an attempt to strike a middle ground with her husband. Maybe you could look at photos instead of videos, she says. This tepid, hesitative flavour, a common quality pervasive throughout most of these columns, reflects the deep-rooted fear of dislodging another’s personal choices. Underlying that fear is the belief that such preferences are fixed, self-contained wholes, outside the realm of discussion and change. It is the belief that these preferences exist on a plane separate from the context of the world inhabited by the individual, and the preservation of their sanctity is of utmost importance.

As partners in intimate relationships are publicly advised to respect each other’s preferences above all else, they are led to believe that the boundaries of the self should be prioritised over establishing moral shared moral codes. In this version of an intimate relationship, there is a sense that the conflict of clashing moralities is in fact most immoral, because if the relationship were to survive the conflict it would require one of the two partners to let go of their stance, and concede to the other. However, this choice-centric morality fails to see the centrality of conflict, compromise and resolution to developing strong connections. In prioritising frictionless-ness over discomfort in all situations, this cultural narrative surrounding relationships forgoes our ability to develop deep and meaningful relationships with each other; people find themselves in an increasingly atomised social landscape.
Today, we find ourselves inundated by private and public ventures whose primary appeal is their ability to relieve the self from the friction of engaging directly with the outside world. In the world of dating apps and matrimonial sites the outside world shows up as other people, where our face-to-face social interactions are riddled with uncertainty, awkwardness, discomfort, and conflict. In other places, such as the fantasy of a cashless economy, or of slick high-speed railway corridors, the outside world shows up as a messy clutter of fallible material objects, that can break down and thus inconvenience the self. However, as seen in my analysis of Shaadi.com and Tinder, the desire to shield the self from the messiness of the outside world at all costs is a fraught ideal. It is grounded in an especially fragile view of the self, and ultimately leads to an inability for the self to form deep and meaningful connections with the world. By recognising the flaws of the principle of frictionless-ness, I hope that we can ground our personal and political pursuits in a different principle. One that is grounded in a desire for collective and whollistic progress, as opposed to a desire for constant self-protection.

**Conclusion**

In always prioritising frictionless-ness over discomfort, we forgo our ability to develop deep and meaningful relationships with each other.
Bibliography


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