No doubt, your tribe is intelligent, dear

Male chauvinism and Women's Lib never go together, but when they are a couple...

■ by D. P. Sabharwal



"It is a universal truth that wives are intelligent," I said, shrugging my shoulders.

"I HAVE BEEN listening to your unconvincing and nonsensical arguments for a long time now," she said. "Barring one odd sentence here and there, what you have said has been mainly derogatory. On top of it, your manner and tone of speech have traces of contempt. So stop fooling around and tell me in plain and simple words what you really think of women," she asked in a harsh and agitated but firm tone.

Suddenly I felt like having been caught in a pair of pincers. What had started as a pleasant conversation to pass time on a lovely Sunday morning had degenerated into a hot discussion and verbal tiff.

After hearing her tirade, with a view to easing the tension I said jocularly, "You really know how to fix someone, darling."

"Don't skirt the main issue. Answer my question in a straight manner without any frills," she commanded.

"Look dear, why should we bother about others?" I said pleadingly and added," As far as you are concerned, I am willing to admit anywhere and any time of the day or night that you are intelligent."

"It is not my question any more. Today you have cast aspersions on my race. You have said many unpleasant and unpalatable things about women. And at times you appeared to be non-serious. So I want to know for sure as to what you really think women are... intelligent or..?" she left the sentence hanging.

I realised I was trapped and had no choice. I had to give her an answer, because the time for jokes and casual talk was over. And the answer had to be true and honest because from my experience of 15 years I knew that she had perfected the technique of catching me telling lies.

So I said meekly, "Well, women may or may not be, but there is no doubt that wives are intelligent."

She gave me a surprised look. Probably she had never expected a positive answer and so perhaps she didn't know what to say.

When I winked at her, she asked hastily, "How do you say that?"

"Say what?" I countered with a view to rocking her further.

"That wives are intelligent?" After a pause she added, "You see, you have experience of only one wife. So how can you talk so confidently?"

Needless to say, she had recovered and was on solid ground in no time.

"Because almost every husband feels that way. It is a universal truth," I said, shrugging my shoulders.

"It does not become a universal truth just because my stupid husband says so," she said teasingly, "unless you prove it."

"That is not difficult. Look, in making the very first move on the chessboard of married life, by selecting me as your life-partner, you have displayed intelligence of the highest order. Haven't you?" I asked.

She had no choice but to nod her head in agreement. "Same is the case with your friends," I continued. "They have been smart in cornering good husbands. Now, doesn't that prove that wives are intelligent? On the other hand, how many of us poor husbands can claim this distinction of being intelligent in the choice of our wives?"

SHE GAVE me a dirty look. From her twitching lips and narrowing eyes I could make out that she was feeling cornered and trapped. And once again from my long experience of living with her, I knew that such a state of affairs was dangerous for me.

On such occasions, she pounces like a hungry lioness. Thus I was nervously waiting for this to happen. I didn't have to spend many agonising moments, for she asked immediately, "Have you stopped beating your wife?"

I was taken aback, for I could not see any connection between the talk and her question. All I could say was, "What a stupid question!"

"No question is ever stupid, dear. But an answer can be," she retorted and said, "Answer my question."

How could I, for I had never beaten her! Moreover, neither "yes" nor "no" would have been the true answer. I was really in a fix. So I asked her, "What is the relevance of this question to what we were talking about?"

"It should convince you that there are certain questions that do not have a simple 'yes' or 'no' as answers. Similarly, there are certain statements that cannot be proved by a simple sentence."

"What do you mean? Will you elaborate?"

"Yes. Now, didn't you say that wives are intelligent because they have picked up good husbands?"

When I nodded in agreement, she said, "Now, that does not prove anything because many stupid ladies have bagged good husbands. And secondly, not all husbands are good. It is a different matter that wives do not say so," she winked at me.

She had made her point, that too very intelligently, but I could not say so because her dig was at me. Instead I said, "There are many more facts to prove my statement. Do you remember what you used to tell me: That you were very studious and always used to secure first or second position till high school. It is only thereafter that your grades were never good. Can you give me the reason?"

"I have told you earlier and I can say it again. You see I didn't bother much and took the studies casually while in college," she said laughingly. "What was the use in sweating? Ultimately I had to get married and settle down."

"There you are and there lies the crux of the matter!" I exclaimed, "You see, darling, even before stepping on to the threshold of married life, the would-be-wife had started acting intelligently. And in this game you are not alone. Are you?"

"To be honest, yes, you are right. But then a single reason is not enough to convince me about your theory that wives are intelligent" she said smilingly.

"Don't worry, to be fair to the fairer sex and to be a gentleman in the eyes of a gentlewoman, I will give you enough examples to convince you," I said and added, "do you agree that most of the educated mothers teach their young ones?"

"Yes," came the prompt answer.

"Do you also agree that once the child moves to the 5th or 6th standard, he is passed over to the husband?"

"Yes, in most cases," she replied, a bit hesitatingly.

"Now, doesn't that prove something?"

"You want to say that we do so because we are not able to cope with the intellectual questioning of the growing children?" she asked agitatedly.

"No, I am not going into the reason for your doing so," I said. "Whatever may be the motive, one thing is clear. It highlights the intelligence of wives. Doesn't it?"

She did not look convinced and fell silent. After what appeared to be an hour, she asked, "What is the basis of your saying so? Do you feel that we don't have adequate knowledge and that we don't teach grown-up kids for fear of their acquiring wrong knowledge?"

"Well, I dare not disagree with you," I said laughingly and went on. "But why are you sad and jittery? Cheer up. Because even if I concede that whatever you have said is right, it does prove my point, but puts you all on an elevated platform. You see. You wives are displaying intelligence by taking correct and timely action."

"Oh, you really know the art of flattery, but to convince me fully, give me one more example of wives' intelligence. Just one more."

"That is easy. But you will have to be honest," I said and asked, "Before marriage, what were the occasions when you cried?"

"Whenever papa or mama rebuked me for doing something wrong," she said earnestly.

"And after marriage, what makes you cry?"

SHE DIDN'T say anything. Instead she just looked at me and smiled. But I didn't let the things rest at that. Teasing her I said, "A wife is wrong until she cries, and then she is instantly right."

"Oh, you are..."

"No, I am not. It is you, and your fellow wives who are intelligent. And I have no hesitation in admitting it."

"But why are you so vociferous in saying so?"

"Because I require small mercies from you, my dear, and I am sure you will be more considerate if I praise you."

"Ah! I see, you are smart. You are no fool!"

"You mean your company has had no effect on me?"

And before her intelligence could decipher as to what I meant, I ran out of the room. □□

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